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THE MAKERS OF BRITISH ART

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"The Chelsea Pensioners" (p. 97).

22

The Makers of British Art

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*Sir David Wilkie, R.A.
Painted by himself at the age of 29.*

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After Wilkie

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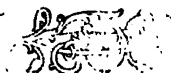
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1903



*Sir David Wilkie, P.A.
Painted by himself at the age of 29.*

WILKIE



David Wilkie

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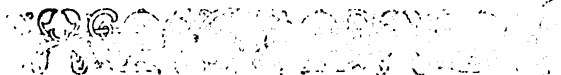
WILLIAM DAYNE

Illustrated with Twenty Plates after Wilkie
and a Photogravure Frontispiece

London

Walter Scott Publishing Co., Ltd.
New York: Charles Scribner's Sons

1903



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TO
JAMES DONALDSON, LL.D.,
PRINCIPAL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. ANDREWS,
IN ADMIRATION OF HIS SUCCESSFUL ENDEAVOURS
ON BEHALF OF SCOTTISH LEARNING AND
CULTURE, AND AS A MARK OF
GRATITUDE FOR MANY
KINDNESSES.

Ms. A. 9. 10. 21. 36

191681

Preface.

THE life and art of Sir David Wilkie are of interest not only to Scottish folk, but to the whole art-loving public; even the historian of European art, who deals with none but the greatest names in the annals of the centuries, will find his records incomplete if he omit to notice the famous Scottish master. It is probably at the present day not sufficiently well recognised how great was the homage universally paid to his genius in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, and how he was held to be representative of British art in general as well as of that of the land of his birth. Thus the present volume appeals to a wider circle than that interested in things peculiarly Scottish; and it will, I hope, approve itself as at once more complete and more comprehensive than any other on the same subject already published; while it is at the same time within a compass which should render it acceptable to busy people who have much to do and many books to read.

The volume includes features of an especial character. The number of Wilkie's noteworthy acquaintances

Sir David Wilkie

was large, and I have thought it of interest to show in some detail the intimate nature of his friendships with prominent men of culture of his day, as Haydon and Sir George Beaumont. On the vexed question of Wilkie's change of style, the solution here offered seems to be supported by careful deductions from the circumstances in which he made the departure from his true line of work. The question is of a sort that is perhaps unique in the history of painting, and, in the case of an artist of Wilkie's eminence, it calls for observant consideration. On the merits of the work Wilkie did as a painter of *genre*, the view, I think, may be justly taken that its decline in the eyes of art critics has been caused more by the assertive dictates of fickle fashion than by any element of weakness in his productions. Fashion rules in the maxims of painting as it does in those of literature and music; and it may be that, with respect to *genre* painting, the negative principle of to-day will be the renaissance spirit of to-morrow. The likelihood, indeed, is that the universal and enduring qualities of charm pertaining to the subject-matter of Wilkie's finest pictures, will always remain and powerfully attract the unbiassed lover of art.

I have to express sincere obligations for much courtesy and help extended to me by owners of Wilkie's paintings. I have to thank the Duke of

Preface

Wellington, the Earl of Camperdown, and the Earl of Mansfield for the privilege, most generously rendered, of obtaining photographs of original paintings for reproduction in this volume. Lady Abercromby very thoughtfully put herself to considerable trouble in regard to the preparation of the plate of "The China Menders," belonging to her brother. My thanks are also due to Sir David Baird, Mrs. Charles Kinnear, and Major Graham Bonar, of Greigston, for the kind permission to view important pictures by Wilkie belonging to them. The Marquis of Lansdowne, Mr. Munro-Ferguson, M.P., Mr. Watson-Armstrong, Mr. Thomas Brocklebank, and Mr. John Naylor most courteously gave me information concerning the works of Wilkie in their possession. The bibliography of Wilkie is somewhat extensive. I have stated the leading authorities which I have had occasion to consult. On the literary side of my task, I wish to express my thanks to certain friends who have given me valued co-operation in various ways. To Mr. James L. Caw, Mr. Algernon Graves, and Mr. J. Bolivar Manson I owe useful suggestions on Wilkie's art. My brother, Mr. Thomas Bayne, and my friends, Mr. George R. T. Ross and Mr. W. Addis Miller, have lightened my task by their advice on points of special criticism and bibliography.

Sir David Wilkie

The spontaneous interest taken by Fifeshire people in my investigations about Wilkie's career has convinced me of the thoroughness of the appreciation with which his work is regarded by those to whom he is closely bound by national ties. It was to me a greatly esteemed honour to receive personal reminiscences of the great painter from his venerable cousin, Miss Hardie, of Pitlessie, who when a girl chatted with him in her father's house. I am indebted to Mrs. Shand, of Northumberland Street, Edinburgh, also a relative of Wilkie's, the Rev. W. H. Porter, Cults, and Mr. George Innes and Mr. Alexander Westwood, junior, of Cupar, for appropriate biographical incidents referring to Sir David's life-work.

WILLIAM BAYNE.

THE UNIVERSITY, ST. ANDREWS,
May 1903.

Contents.

CHAPTER I.

WILKIE'S SCOTTISH PRECURSORS.

	PAGE
Wilkie's versatility—Preceding models—David Allan—Allan's satirical sketches and sketches of Scots life and character—Thomson's <i>Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs</i> —Burns on David Allan—Dutch <i>genre</i> —Scots portraiture—George Jamesone—The Medinas—Joseph Michael Wright—William Aikman—Allan Ramsay, the younger—David Martin—Sir Henry Raeburn—Scots historical painting—Gavin Hamilton—The brothers Runciman—Scots landscape work—Wilkie's comparative neglect of landscape—Jacob More—Alexander Nasmyth	I

CHAPTER II.

BIRTH AND APPRENTICESHIP.

Wilkie's birthplace—The Wilkie stock—Professor William Wilkie—Wilkie's father and mother—The manse at Cults—Precocity—At the Trustees' Academy, Edinburgh—Studentship—John
--

Sir David Wilkie

	PAGE
Graham—Student drawings—Lockhart on Wilkie's youthful studies—First draught of "The Village Politicians"—Sketch from <i>The Gentle Shepherd</i> —Sketch from Home's <i>Douglas</i> —Return to Cults—Letter from John Graham—"Pitlessie Fair"—"The Village Recruit"—Sketches at Cults—Kinghorn, St. Andrews, and Aberdeen—Setting out for London	18

CHAPTER III.

EARLY SUCCESSES.

Life in London—The Royal Academy classes—Fellow-students—B. R. Haydon—Jackson—Visits to galleries—Introduced to Lord Mansfield—"The Village Politicians"—Sir George Beaumont—Professor Knight's <i>Memorials of Coleorton</i> —Lord Mulgrave—"Alfred in the Neatherd's Cottage"—"The Blind Fiddler"—"The Card Players"—"The Rent Day"—"The Clubbists"—"The New Coat"—Commission from Lord Lansdowne—"The Sick Lady"—The Elgin Marbles—"The Village Festival"—John Burnet—At Coleorton—"The Gipsy Mother"	36
--	----

CHAPTER IV.

ROYAL ACADEMICIAN.

"The Wardrobe Ransacked"—Picture of the Neave family—A.R.A.—Haydon's quarrel with the Royal Academy—Wilkie's withdrawal of "The Wardrobe Ransacked" from the Royal Academy—Ill health—At Dunmow—Completes "The Village Festival"—R.A.—Visit to Cults—Changes his London residence—Holds a private exhibition of his pictures—Death	
--	--

Contents

	PAGE
of the Rev. David Wilkie—Mrs. Wilkie and Helen Wilkie settle in London—"Blind Man's Buff"—"The Bagpiper"—"The Letter of Introduction"—"Duncan Gray"—In Paris—"Distraint for Rent"—"The Rabbit on the Wall"—Holiday in the Netherlands—Visit to Hougomont—Arrested at Calais—"The Breakfast"—"Sheepwashing"—Tour in Scotland—"The Abbotsford Family"—Burgess of Cupar—"The Death of Sir Philip Sidney"—"The Penny Wedding"	58

CHAPTER V.

MERIDIAN OF FAME.

The Iron Duke commissions "The Chelsea Pensioners"—"The China Menders"—"The Reading of a Will"—Professor Holmberg on "The Reading of a Will"—Maiden speech—Arduous labour at "The Chelsea Pensioners"—Love story—Minor pictures—"The School"—Over to France to recuperate—"The Chelsea Pensioners" in the Royal Academy Exhibition—Story regarding the payment of the picture—Wilkie's picture on George IV.'s visit to Edinburgh—William Collins—Sir Robert Peel—Limner to the King for Scotland—"The Parish Beadle"—Sketches from <i>The Gentle Shepherd</i> —"The Smugglers"—Illness of Mrs. Wilkie—Another trip to Scotland—Entertained by the artists of Edinburgh—Death of Mrs. Wilkie—Further domestic calamities—Breakdown—Resolves to visit Italy	81
--	----

CHAPTER VI.

ITALY.

Wilkie sets out for Italy—Paris doctor consulted—Journey through Switzerland—Milan—Change of style—Goethe on art—Pisa—
--

Sir David Wilkie

	PAGE
Florence—Rome—Criticism of Michael Angelo—Holy Week at Rome—Financial troubles—Bologna—Parma—Venice—Titian and Tintoretto—Correspondence with Peel and Beaumont—Raimbach's <i>Memoirs</i> —Visit to Germany—Innsbruck—Munich—"The Reading of a Will"—Dresden—The baths at Töplitz—Vienna—Return to Italy—Entertained by Scottish artists at Rome—Death of Beaumont—George IV.'s generosity—Revived strength—Italian pictures—Geneva—Arrival in Spain	101

CHAPTER VII.

IN SPAIN, AND AFTERWARDS.

Impressions of Spain—Burgos—Madrid—Pictures in the Escorial—Criticism of Murillo and Velasquez—"The Maid of Saragossa"—"The Spanish Posada"—"The Guerilla's Departure"—Washington Irving—Return to England—Patronage of George IV.—Turner—Wilkie's pictures at the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1829—Critics of the New Mode—Illustrates the Waverley Novels—Death of Lawrance—Candidature for presidency of the Royal Academy—Serjeant-Painter—The Holyrood picture—"The Guerilla's Return"—Portrait of Lady Lyndhurst—Portrait of Lord Melville—Portrait of William IV.	124
--	-----

CHAPTER VIII.

CULTIVATING HISTORY.

Wilkie's second style—"The Preaching of Knox before the Lords of the Congregation"—Death of Sir Walter Scott—Royal favours—"Two Monks at Confession"—Commissions from

Contents

	PAGE
the Duke of Wellington—"The Spanish Mother"—"Sir David Baird discovering the body of Tippoo Sahib"—"Christopher Columbus in the Convent at La Rabida"—"The First Ear-ring"—Portrait of Edward Irving—Wilkie visits Ireland—Irish sketches—"The Smuggling Still at Work"—"The Peep o' Day Boy"—Portrait of the Duke of Wellington—"Napoleon and the Pope"—Knighted—Incidents regarding the Sir David Baird picture—Notes on art—"Queen Victoria's First Council"—"John Knox dispensing the Sacrament at Calder House"—Exhibits of 1840	144

CHAPTER IX.

JOURNEY TO THE EAST, AND DEATH.

Departure for Palestine—The Hague—Vienna—The Gates of the East—Constantinople—"The Turkish Letter-Writer"—Portrait of the Sultan—Smyrna—Jerusalem—The Dead Sea level—Opinion of sacred art among the Venetian painters—Homeward bound—Portrait of Mehemet Ali—Last illness and burial—Haydon's tribute—Letter of condolence from the President and Council of the Royal Academy—The meeting at the Thatched House Tavern—Statue by Joseph—Eastern sketches—Portrait of Hallicoo Mirza—Admiral Walker's daughter—Portraits of Turkish women—Portraits of Turkish soldiers and servants—Sacred subjects—Turkish scenes—Prices of Wilkie's pictures	168
--	-----

CHAPTER X.

APPRECIATION.

Temporary eclipse—Personal appearance—Unselfishness—Friendship with Haydon—Partiality for Scottish talent—Haydon's
--

•

PAGExvi

List of Illustrations.

SIR DAVID WILKIE, R.A. From a Photograph by Messrs. Walker & Cockerell of the Original by Wilkie in the National Portrait Gallery, London.	<i>Frontispiece</i>
THE VILLAGE POLITICIANS From a Photograph by Messrs. Walker & Cockerell of the Original. By permission of the Earl of Mansfield.	<i>To face page 32</i>
THE BLIND FIDDLER From a Photograph by Messrs. Walker & Cockerell of the Original in the National Gallery, London.	" 49
THE RENT DAY From the Engraving by A. Raimbach, after the Original.	" 48
THE JEW'S HARP From the Engraving by John Burnet, after the Original.	" 56
THE VILLAGE FESTIVAL From a Photograph by Messrs. Walker & Cockerell of the Original in the National Gallery, London.	" 64
BLIND MAN'S BUFF From the Engraving by A. Raimbach, after the Original in His Majesty's collection.	" 72
THE LETTER OF INTRODUCTION From the Engraving by John Burnet, after the Original.	" 80
DUNCAN GRAY From the Engraving by F. Engleheart, after the Original.	" 88
THE RABBIT ON THE WALL From the Engraving by John Burnet, after the Original.	" 96

Sir David Wilkie

THE PENNY WEDDING	To face page 104
From the Engraving by J. Stewart, after the Original in His Majesty's collection.	
THE CHINA MENDERS	112
From a Photograph by Mr. L. C. Keighly-Peach of the Original. By permission of the Earl of Camperdown.	
THE CHELSEA PENSIONERS	120
From a Photograph by Messrs. Walker & Cockerell of the Original By permission of the Duke of Wellington.	
THE PARISH BEADLE	128
From a Photograph by Messrs. Walker & Cockerell of the Original in the Tate Gallery.	
THE MAID OF SARAGOSSA	136
From the Engraving by Samuel Cousins, R.A., after the Original.	
JOHN KNOX PREACHING TO THE LORDS OF THE CONGREGATION	144
From the Engraving by G. T. Doo, R.A., after the Original.	
COLUMBUS AT THE CONVENT OF LA RABIDA	152
From the Engraving by H. T. Ryall, after the Original.	
THE FIRST EAR-RING	160
From the Engraving by Chevalier, after the Original.	
NAPOLEON AND POPE PIUS VII. AT FONTAINEBLEAU	168
From the Engraving by J. H. Robinson, R.A., after the Original.	
QUEEN VICTORIA'S FIRST COUNCIL	176
From the Engraving by C. Fox, after the Original in His Majesty's collection.	
JOHN KNOX DISPENSING THE SACRAMENT AT CALDER HOUSE	184
From a Photograph by T. & R. Annan of the Original (unfinished) in the National Gallery, Edinburgh.	

Sir David Wilkie, R.A.

CHAPTER I.

WILKIE'S SCOTTISH PRECURSORS.

Wilkie's versatility—Preceding models—David Allan—Allan's satirical sketches and sketches of Scots life and character—Thomson's *Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs*—Burns on David Allan—Dutch *genre*—Scots portraiture—George Jamesone—The Medinas—Joseph Michael Wright—William Aikman—Allan Ramsay, the younger—David Martin—Sir Henry Raeburn—Scots historical painting—Gavin Hamilton—The brothers Runciman—Scots landscape work—Wilkie's comparative neglect of landscape—Jacob More—Alexander Nasmyth.

WILKIE'S work in painting, while not always concerned with Scottish themes, and done for the most part on English soil, shows pretty decisively that it was based on that of Scottish exponents of his art." If it be no defensible law in painting, as by authoritative agreement it is not one in poetry, that the artist should bind his genius to a single method of expression, then Wilkie's figure in art is of unusual fascination. Of strong versatility, he was endowed with precious influences from the past.

*The Hour
and the
Man*

Sir David Wilkie

The greatest of Scottish, and one of the foremost of British painters, he may be taken as representative of the culminating artistic forces of an era. It happened as it has often happened in other spheres of action: the hour as well as the man was ripe. Wilkie by his versatility was able to cope, more or less effectively, with all the prominent forms of painting; and in doing so he had ever before him some meritorious exemplar of native genius. To say this is to do hardly more than draw attention to a chronological fact. It is not by any means to disparage the extraordinary original gift of Wilkie, who shines beside the little masters of Scotland whom he succeeded, much as does Scott when compared with the old minstrels. Nothing could have restricted the splendid play of his genius, apart altogether from the question of preceding models. Yet that dim forecasts of his achievement existed is noticeable, and has a value of its own.

Before Wilkie's time, though at no distant date, there flourished in Scotland painters of *genre*, portrait-painters, artists in historical painting, and landscape-painters; to each of these groups, if the last be largely excepted, he is linked by a definite tie of interest. Due recognition of the historical elements out of which Wilkie's art was moulded goes so far to minimise the importance of his later change of style, which was less one of subject than of vehicle and form. This view was advocated by Ruskin; this he did, it is true, disparagingly, but the substance of his contention may be accepted as

David Allan

pertinent. "Wilkie," he writes, "was an historical painter and Chantrey an historical sculptor because they painted or carved the veritable men and things they saw, not men and things as they believed they might have been or should have been. But no one tells such men they are historical painters, and they are discontented with what they do, and poor Wilkie must needs travel to see the Grand School, and imitate the Grand School, and ruin himself." What, in fact, has to be kept in mind is this—that Wilkie elaborated all the varieties of painting long before the much-argued results of his journeys to Italy and Spain.

To David Allan belongs the credit of producing the earliest pieces of British *genre*; and it is evident that Wilkie owed hints to Allan both in this line and, somewhat remotely, in historical painting. The love of nature was with Wilkie the primary axiom throughout his career, but in youth his admiration went forth also to the pictures of Allan. His friend Burnet speaks very appropriately on this matter. "He made," Burnet says, "nature his Ostade and Teniers, and Carse with his fine tone of colour his Rembrandt and Jan Steen. Next to nature he loved the works of David Allan; and as Raphael is traced in Pietro Perugino, so may David the First be traced, but in a loftier degree, in David the Second. Wilkie, as you may see in some of his pictures, did not hesitate to avail himself of several of Allan's attitudes: I can see this even in the 'Chelsea Pensioners'; but the one was always within the circle of

Sir David Wilkie

taste and propriety, while the other, even in his happiest works, seldom seems to have observed such limits, which are easier felt than defined." It is not so clear that, as Burnet affirms, Alexander Carse, also a disciple of Allan's, influenced Wilkie. It is the fashion of Carse's humour rather than the superiority of his technique that places him with Brouwer, to whom he is sometimes likened.

David Allan was born at Alloa, in Clackmannanshire, in 1744, and died at Edinburgh in 1796. He studied at Rome, and, for an interval not exactly ascertained, practised in London. He earned distinction in his foreign studies, being awarded by the Academy of St. Luke a medal of silver and another of gold for the excellence of one of his pictures. This was a brilliant little picture in oil, called "The Origin of Painting; or, The Corinthian Maid drawing the Shadow of her Lover." It now hangs in the Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh. It was not in Allan's true manner, being done in the style of academic formalism that was fashionable during his stay at Rome. Yet there is much charm in the workmanship; and Wilkie is said to have praised it as "one of the best-told stories that colour and canvas ever united to relate." Other pieces of a historical kind, painted by Allan while he sojourned abroad, were "The Prodigal Son," and "Hercules and Omphale."

At this time, also, he drew four satirical sketches, descriptive of the Roman carnival. These may have been suggested by the "Election Series" of Hogarth;

Allan's Satirical Sketches

they reveal, at any rate, a certain affinity to Hogarth's mode of caricature, and a treatment of character and grouping similar to his. These sketches have the following titles:—1. The Opening of the Carnival; 2. Politeness of Romans to Strangers; 3. Horse Race at Rome; 4. The Victor conducted in Triumph. They are strongly touched with caricature: through emphasis of this sort the drawing loses in clearness in some particulars. The first depicts a group of revellers stirred by the sound of the great bell of the Capitol. The motley character of the gathering is in this picture excellently seized. A modern painter in an ancient dress, a knight of Malta, a French grenadier in the Pope's service, a wandering ballad-singer, and representatives of a Jewish family compose the principal figures of a piquant group. The second sketch varies from this, not so much in essentials as in the scene. In it is described the appearance of the crowd in front of the palace Ruspoli, from the spot where was beheld the spectacle of the horse-race. The different personages are again delineated with brusqueness of fancy and ingenuity of design, and the study is altogether animated and well realised. The two other pictures, if not so full of bright characterisation, are yet aptly imagined and dexterously rendered. Besides these Roman drawings, Allan painted some half-dozen additional pieces in the temper of caricature. All of these approve the facility and verve which are associated with natural inclination. But, good as they are, they are

Sir David Wilkie

not his best and most typical performance, the performance which was to throw round his name a lustre as the most distinctive precursor of Wilkie.

Allan, on taking up his residence in Scotland in 1786, was appointed master of the Trustees' Academy, an institution for the practice of the fine arts that had been established at Edinburgh in 1760. Then it was that he set about the interpretation of the familiar scenes of Scottish life upon which his fame rests.

Scots Life and Character His first effort was directed to illustrating an edition of Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd*. For this book he prepared ten designs.

Though the task suited him, and he was successful in it, he appears not to have considered it as of sufficient dignity for artistic purposes. In the dedication of the volume, which is made to Gavin Hamilton, the artist, he says:—"You must take these designs as a specimen of my occupations: the country gives no encouragement to heroic or historic subjects, and I am glad, therefore, to work in a humbler line; and, without descending to mean and low objects, give a correct representation of ordinary life, which may be made pleasing and instructive as well as morally useful." The prompt acceptance with which his illustrations were welcomed by the public must have quite undeceived him. They established his fame all over Scotland. The engravings were done in aquatint by his own hand. The execution is somewhat rude, and Allan in his preface pleads for generous consideration to his labours. He remarks that his intention was "not to offer smooth

“The Gentle Shepherd”

and expensive engravings, but expressive and characteristic designs.” It is not too much to say that he realised his modest aim. The fourth and tenth designs have most spirit. In the fourth considerable quaintness is conveyed to the figure of the old woman, who is at the moment being asked by a client to cast his horoscope. The tenth, while admirable in itself, has an enhanced claim to attention from its close identity with a scene of Wilkie’s. The graceful “Cottage Toilet” of Wilkie has an elaborate parallel in this design by Allan. The three principal figures—Peggy, Jenny, and Glaud—are the same in each instance. Wilkie’s picture, however, has the distinctly simpler composition. He introduces but three figures, and has few accessories. Allan, on the other hand, has two subsidiary figures, an old maidservant and a shepherd; while the environment is more complex. The effect of both conception and drawing in the two pictures is to put in contrast the laboured exertion of the early painter, and the ready elegance of his successor. It deserves to be remembered that the publishers of this edition of *The Gentle Shepherd*, illustrated by David Allan, were the Foulises of Glasgow. Twenty years before, they set their imprint on the most sumptuous edition of Gray’s *Odes* ever published. Gray spoke with enthusiasm of their “laudable ambition of surpassing the Etiennes and the Elzevirs as well in literature as in the proper art of their profession.”

From the pictorial adornment of the pages of *The*

Sir David Wilkie

Gentle Shepherd Allan turned to the rendering of Scottish manners and to the wealth of beautiful incident in the poetry of Burns and the old nameless song-writers. Simultaneously, he essayed some historical paintings. He prospered best with his humorous sketches, and, among those taken from episodes of Scottish life, "The Highland Dance" and "The Scotch Wedding" must be assigned a leading place. "The Scotch Wedding," moreover, may have suggested something to Wilkie in his treatment of the same subject. The plan of the design is virtually the same in both cases. The part of the wedding celebration upon which the two artists have dwelt is the dance following the marriage ceremony. The main grouping of the composition is similar : a few of the merry-makers are engaged in dancing, while others act as spectators or prolong the feast in a fragmentary fashion. Yet a wide gulf separates the art of the two pictures. Allan's rendering of his composition is extremely crude, his drawing angular and weak. His picture is saved from failure by its lively stamp of the sense of drollery and glee. Wilkie's "Penny Wedding" is a very different matter. Here, indeed, he may be observed in his most capable mood : he is dramatic, vivid, masterly in drawing and forcible in colour ; at once effective alike in design and in painting.

Allan's occupation as an illustrator of Burns and the Scottish lyrists was the result of a commission. George Thomson, the musical enthusiast, was busy with the publication of his *Collection* of lyrics ; and,

Burns on David Allan

having obtained the help of Burns, he hoped through Allan's illustrations to lend further glory to the book. For the *Collection* Allan produced about twelve designs, several of these for poems by Burns. That illustrating the song, "John Anderson, my Jo," has been much praised. The mingled humour and pathos of the story are strikingly presented. Burns's correspondence proves his thorough appreciation of Allan's handiwork. He devotes a letter to a long and careful description of the stock-and-horn, an ancient musical instrument which Allan was wont to associate with the minstrelsy of his shepherds. This letter concludes with emphatic commendation of the artist's treatment of Scottish dress. "I will say it," he declares, "that I look on Mr. Allan and Mr. Burns to be the only genuine and real painters of Scottish costume in the world." In another letter he alludes to the beauty of a design which dealt with the sentiment of the old song, "Woo'd and Married an' a'." This, it seems to Burns, "is admirable." The grouping he thinks "beyond all praise"; while he maintains that "the expression of the figures, conformable to the story of the ballad, is absolutely faultless perfection." Such flattering terms do not bear analysis. Cunningham takes a sounder view of these domestic sketches. While Allan, he contends, draws a scene of rough humour with a good deal of power, his touch was too heavy to treat with precision "the delicate hues of feeling and of fancy." Allan's most fatal defect was his lack of discernment in the portrayal of character;

Sir David Wilkie

here he not unseldom crossed the boundary between truth and caricature.

Conjecture can be the only guide as to the possibility of Allan's acquaintance with the works of the celebrated

Dutch genre Dutch *genre* painters of the seventeenth century. Prints of these were possibly known to him. But it is quite probable that, like Hogarth in the appropriate task of illustrating *Hudibras*, he came to his peculiar employment guided by the spontaneity of his instinct. From the work of none of the Dutch *genre* painters is there reason to suppose that Allan imitated or even knew their productions. The points of actual resemblance consist in trifling details that he has in common with Jan Steen. Their subjects are sometimes alike, while both have a decided taste for the grotesque. But the Dutch painter's draughtsmanship and colour so very far excel that it may be regarded as certain that Allan had no cognisance of them. The relationship between the Dutch school of *genre* and that of Scotland, which developed so markedly in Wilkie, is curiously obscure in its origins. Sir Walter Armstrong thinks that the kindred inspiration may have sprung up in Wilkie from his having seen, in his days as a student at the Trustees' Academy, a picture by Jan Molenaer, whose technical qualities seem to be mirrored in "Pitlessie Fair." Yet this, as he admits, must be looked upon as mere guesswork. It is truly passing strange that, though for half a century there was in Scotland a sympathy, if scarcely more, for *genre* painting, at last

Scots Portraiture

this branch of art should assume vigorous shape, and arise almost Minerva-like, from the brain of one man.

Scottish portrait-painting flourished well at the outset of Wilkie's career. Scottish painting, in fact, in its primary manifestations, had its most eminent interpreters in portrait-painters. *Scots Portraiture* Wilkie opened his professional career by aspiring to a place among them. But the position did not prove congenial, and, once he gained a footing, he reflected upon portrait-painting with some indifference, felicitating himself as "having luckily failed in it." Yet the record of this art as it then existed in Scotland was far from unattractive; nor were the men who exercised their skill in it undeserving of emulation. The period that intervened between Jamesone and Raeburn might with justice be designated the silver dawn of Scottish painting. Wilkie's relation to it, however, as far as external evidence goes, was nearly altogether of a purely biographical kind—his boyish intimacy with Martin, the assistant of the younger Ramsay. We have no mention in his history of his eagerness regarding the works of the distinguished portrait-painters who had dignified their art with European fame—George Jamesone, the Medinas, Joseph Michael Wright, Aikman, and Allan Ramsay. Jamesone, whose permanent repute dates from the beginning of the seventeenth century, was the first real master in Scottish painting. A minor painter, yet a classic, it may be noted that he was a contemporary of Velasquez and Murillo. Born in Aberdeen,

Sir David Wilkie

the scene of his professional labours, he studied at Antwerp; Rubens was his teacher, and Van Dyck is thought to have been a fellow-student. Sir John Medina was much lauded for his portraits of women. Medina's son adopted his father's employment; he met, however, with less favour, though Hume extolled him in an original ode. Hume foresaw a noteworthy place for this painter in the annals of culture, and modestly classed himself as a satellite:—

“ Even I, in literary story,
Perhaps shall have my share of glory.”

Joseph Michael Wright possessed undoubted artistic talent, and his work has been authoritatively recognised as of signal merit. Pepys, who held as anathema Shakespeare and Scotsmen, refers to him curtly as “one Wright”; but the Scottish artist was reckoned competent enough to act as the substitute for Sir Peter Lely as the painter of official portraits of the law judges.

The life of William Aikman, the friend of Swift, Pope, and Thomson, was romantic in its course, and his painting was poetic and refined. Of good family, he sold his paternal estate that thus he might secure the means to pursue the study of art in Italy. He afterwards resided in London, where, on the death of Sir Godfrey Kneller, much of that artist's practice fell to him. The fame of Allan Ramsay, the younger, rose to an uncommon height in his own day, and it may fairly be said to be supported by the opinion of recent times.

David Martin

He was born in 1713, and died in 1784. After studying at Rome, professional ambition soon attracted him to London. Here he won remarkable popularity as a portrait-painter, and amassed a fortune. George III. appointed him Serjeant-Painter, a post received even over the claims of Reynolds. His portraits, if never evincing the finer gifts of imagination or characterised by strength of treatment, are seldom without exactitude and finish.

The names of David Martin and Sir Henry Raeburn bring the consideration of Scottish portraiture within touch of Wilkie's own endeavour. To both he was indebted for hardly anything save the force of personal example. Martin was a near predecessor, Raeburn a veteran contemporary. Martin, who was a native of Anstruther, in Fife, where he was born in the year 1737, did much clever work as a portrait-painter in Edinburgh, and died in London thirteen years after the birth of Wilkie. He acted for some years as the assistant of Ramsay, and was the instructor of Raeburn. Martin's brother was the minister of Monimail, the parish next to Culter, the birthplace of Wilkie. Cunningham, in his *Life of Sir David Wilkie*, says that in the manse of Monimail young Wilkie occasionally met the minister's brother, "whose conversation tended to confirm the boy in his inclination to become an artist." Martin's painting, if undistinguished, was always sound and careful. Of Raeburn and his portraits it were needless here to speak at any length: they hold a supreme position among paintings of their

Sir David Wilkie

kind, and in comparison with them those of Wilkie may scarcely be named. Yet in one significant principle these two artists agreed. Both believed that the individuality of the subject and not precise detail of feature ought to be the distinctive aim of the painter. Raeburn approved this idea with a penetration of judgment and a technical mastery not always surpassed by Reynolds. Wilkie's conception of a portrait is generally sustained by a capable insight, which, however, except in that of Lord Kellie and a few others, is qualified by a disappointing inefficacy of touch. Unanimity of idea is the notable fact in regard to the two men.

Historical painting was cultivated in Scotland, both with zeal and nicety, in the thirty years antecedent to Wilkie's professional life. Its most praiseworthy representatives were Gavin Hamilton and the brothers Runciman. David Allan, as before mentioned, tried his hand in this vein, one of his subjects being "The Escape of Queen Mary from Lochleven Castle," a subject also of Wilkie's. In the productions of these artists, Wilkie, even if he obtained no strong impulse, was confronted with paintings which were at once judiciously planned and delicately wrought, and which no doubt evoked his approbation. It was to West and Barry, at all events, that he turned with words of early praise when he arrived in London. Hamilton passed most of his life in Rome, where, like David Allan, he gained the gold medal of the Academy of St. Luke. His greatest performance was a series of designs for the *Iliad*. Others of his subjects were

The Runcimans

"Mary, Queen of Scots, resigning her Crown," and "The Death of Lucrezia." The elder Runciman, named Alexander, occupied the office of master of the Edinburgh Trustees' Academy; the younger, John, died before his genius could ripen, but the pictures of his that we have reveal faculties of a unique and sterling kind. Alexander Runciman's bent as a historical painter led him to propose to Sir John Clerk of Penicuik that he should embellish that baronet's mansion with a series of paintings from Ossian. Despite ridicule from the learned, the plan was favourably considered, and the designs were completed. They are by no means destitute of spirit and romantic charm. John Runciman excelled his brother in the profounder qualities of painting. There are in his scenes a genuine poetic insight, a sureness of draughtsmanship, and an unusual sense of colour. These qualities are to be readily observed in the small canvases that now hang in the Scottish National Gallery—"Lear in the Storm," "The Temptation," and "Christ and His Disciples going to Emmaus." The death of John Runciman at the age of twenty-four robbed Scotland of a painter of the richest promise.

Wilkie's comparative neglect of landscape was inevitable. In opposition to the outward language of those "cold eyes" remarked upon by some of his biographers, he was human to the core; and *Landscape*
men and women in their everyday activities *Work*
had for him an overwhelming attractiveness. His view of life was the antithesis of the misanthropic conviction

Sir David Wilkie

that affected literature in the beginning of the nineteenth century. He would have reversed Byron's plaintive declaration about nature and man. Wilkie loved not nature less, but man the more. The original gift was not wanting, for the few landscapes that he drew do not betray poverty of skill. If it were possible to accept the contention of some of his critics that he was excessively biassed towards imitation, it might be wished that he had been constrained to this end by the rustic visions of Isaac van Ostade among the Dutch *genre* painters, or by the pastoral gaieties of Wouvermans, in bravery of talent the king of them all. In this way, if not out of the resources of his own inspiration, posterity might have rejoiced in the possession of adequate complementary transcripts to set beside "The Village Politicians" and "The Blind Fiddler." Independently of this consideration, the admirable landscape work of two of Wilkie's immediate forerunners, Jacob More and Alexander Nasmyth, might well have induced him to its pursuit. Both these artists were men of unmistakable genius, of comprehensiveness of grasp, and of much accomplishment in painting. The one was the friend of Goethe, the other of Burns and Scott. More lived all his professional days in Italy, sharing with Gavin Hamilton in the decoration of the palace of Prince Borghese. For several years he regularly exhibited at the Royal Academy, and pictures of his were on sale in Edinburgh during Wilkie's studentship. Nasmyth studied under Ramsay, and then practised in Edinburgh. He started with portraits, for one of the finest of which

Alexander Nasmyth

Burns sat. In 1793 he abandoned portraiture for landscape, and his Scottish reputation as a landscape-painter was very great before he first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1813. His pictures display boldness of touch, and freedom and beauty of colour. His mantle fell upon Wilkie's noted contemporary, John Thomson, the minister of Duddingston.

CHAPTER II.

BIRTH AND APPRENTICESHIP.

WILKIE'S birthplace—The Wilkie stock—Professor William Wilkie—Wilkie's father and mother—The manse at Culds—Precocity—At the Trustees' Academy, Edinburgh—Studentship—John Graham—Student drawings—Lockhart on Wilkie's youthful studies—First draught of "The Village Politicians"—Sketch from *The Gentle Shepherd*—Sketch from Home's *Douglas*—Return to Culds—Letter from John Graham—"Pitlessie Fair"—"The Village Recruit"—Sketches at Culds—Kinghorn, St. Andrews, and Aberdeen—Setting out for London.

DAVID WILKIE'S birthplace is one of the most picturesque nooks of Fifeshire, a county rather unfairly described by James I. of Scotland as a grey "*The Kingdom*" mantle with a gold fringe, there being threads of gold in it everywhere. The manse and church of the parish of Culds, of which David's father was minister, is situated in a valley about four miles west of the town of Cupar. Close by, on the north, are the woods and mansion of Crawford Priory; farther north, at a distance of a few miles, lies the estate of the Mount, the residence of the Reformation poet, Sir David Lindsay, whose drama of "The Three Estaitis" was first represented at Cupar. Adjacent to Culds manse rises Walton Hill, like most

Cults Parish

Fife hills well-wooded to the crest. West of this hill, about six miles off, are the "blue Lomonds," the fond memory of which Wilkie often recalled. The whole environment has an agreeable, pastoral aspect, and was fit home for the nurture of a painter. Circumstances, if not preference, might suitably have made Wilkie a delineator of landscape. Just as in the rich expanse of the Howe of Fife, which skirts Cults parish, nature has been prolific of bounty in this sequestered spot. The trees have here a fine sweep of branch and luxuriance of leaf; in due season there blooms a plenitude of flowers in the district: the sweet-briar—"all Elysian pungency"—the wild poppy, and the marguerite lavish their splendour upon the bright June days. Doubtless, the gentle influence of this environment wrought a certain unconscious impress on the young artist. Who will say that it did not sensibly clarify and sweeten his discernment of the world of man?

David Wilkie was born on the 10th of November, 1785. His father was David Wilkie, minister of Cults parish; his mother was Isabella Lister, *Birth* daughter of a farmer in the parish, and third wife of the minister. The Wilkie stock originally belonged to Midlothian, where the lairdship of Ratho-Byres, a small estate near Edinburgh, was long in their possession. The Wilkies actively sustained their part in the doings of Scottish history; the strifes of the Reformation and of the Jacobite rebellion had touched them closely; one of their number, a minister of the Church of Scotland, is

Sir David Wilkie

said to have courageously exploded the belief in witchcraft in his neighbourhood. Asked to preach a sermon against it, he preached on the folly of believing in it. The most distinguished of the race was William Wilkie, Professor of Natural Philosophy in the University of St. Andrews. He was the author of a heroic poem, called *The Epigoniad*, a tale of the second siege of Thebes. This is a careful narrative, written in precise and smoothly-flowing metre. Professor Wilkie at his death was lamented in an elegy by Robert Fergusson, who was one of his students. The artist's

His father studied first at Edinburgh University,
Father then at that of St. Andrews. After holding two assistantships, he was elected to the pastorate of Cults. He married first Mary Campbell—sister of one of the ministers of Cupar, and aunt of Lord Campbell—"still remembered," Cunningham says, "as one of the loveliest women of the land." She died of fever within a year. The minister of Cults's second wife, Margaret Wilkie, did not long survive. Isabella Lister, his third wife, although much younger than her husband, proved a judicious and esteemed helpmate. Their family numbered five, of whom David Wilkie was the third. The others were three sons, John, James, and Thomas, and a daughter Helen. On the monumental slab raised by Sir David to his parents in the church of Cults he tells of the veneration in which his father was held among his people "for his sympathy with their temporal vicissitudes, and his zeal in ministering to their spiritual wants." In another sentence,

The Manse Nursery

he speaks of his father being "distinguished among his brethren by his labours in reducing to a theory of calculation the contingency of human life." This probably refers, though somewhat vaguely, to Mr. Wilkie's volume on *The Theory of Interest*, he, like his eminent son, having a taste for mathematical studies. Mr. Wilkie died in 1813, when his son's fame was thoroughly established. With wise and loving solicitude, he watched every step in the youth's road to fortune.

A visitor to the manse at Cults is shown a room on the second floor, the window of which affords a charming glimpse of the Lomond Hills; in this room, with clean, brown-washed walls, there once existed the early traces of Sir David Wilkie's pencil. The unthinking vandalism of the servants of Mr. Gillespie, Mr. Wilkie's successor at Cults, swept these valuable markings for ever from view. The damage, it is fair to add, was done without the knowledge of the new minister. Mr. Gillespie, afterwards Professor Gillespie, of St. Andrews, has these interesting remarks on the subject:—"When in September, 1813, I became minister of Cults, orders were given that the manse should be prepared for my reception, and painters and whitewashers began their labours. On my arrival, on looking at the room which had been the nursery, I observed the dim and half-obliterated outlines of heads and hands visible through the whitewash. On enquiry, I found that these—some of them, at least—were the almost infantine attempts

*The
Nursery
in the
Manse*

Sir David Wilkie

at drawing of my friend Sir David; and great was my anger at the tasteless haste with which the orders of purification had been performed. They consisted, I was told, chiefly of portraits, touched into the humorous, of persons who were visitors at the manse, or who frequented the kirk, and were drawn with chalk, charcoal, pencil, keel, nay ink; for almost anything was in those days in his hands an instrument of art."¹

One of the most remarkable facts of Wilkie's career is the quick maturity of his powers. Some of his finest work was done at the age of nineteen. His *Precocity* boyhood was notably precocious. He could draw, it is told, before he was able to write or spell. Once, when a mere child, he sketched a woman's head with chalk upon the floor, a picture, he said, "of bonnie Lady Gonie." Lady Balgonie it was to whom he referred. He left the school of Pitlessie, a village in Cults parish, at the age of twelve; at the school of Kingskettle, a few miles distant, his fame as a boy limner had preceded him. Scott in his boyhood,

¹ Church elections in Scotland are, and have always been, precarious affairs. A somewhat entertaining comment on these elections is furnished by Mr. Gillespie. Above the gate of the manse wall (so the accomplished minister of the parish, the Rev. W. H. Porter, informs me) there was carved by Mr. Gillespie this Latin inscription, which still testifies to his satisfaction with his appointment:—

"Inveni portum. Spes et fortuna valet;
Sat me lusistis, ludite nunc alios."

("I have found a haven. Hope and chance farewell! You have sported with me enough, sport now with others.")

Physical Accomplishments

evolving miniature stories of romance, or Pope's celebrated "lipping in numbers," affords a good parallel to the facts regarding the boyhood of Wilkie. As he grew up, his passion for art led to a complete concentration of his powers. As a youth, he was an excellent mimic and something of an actor. He acquired, apparently with a predominant motive, various physical accomplishments. One of these was his dexterity in wielding the fore-hammer in the village forge. Again, he is described as being able to set forth an accurate representation of the attitudes of a shoemaker when engaged in sewing a boot; the position of the feet, the pressure of the knees, the tightening of the lips, and the jerk of the elbows as the hemp goes home, had all been minutely observed and mastered. He was equally alert as to the handicraft of the weaver. He could imitate the nod of the weaver's head and the swing of his body, and echo the very sounds produced by the different movements of the loom.

Cunningham makes reference to an interesting folio book of drawings that appears to have been the young artist's commonplace-book. These drawings, to the number of twenty, differ from the work of his later years in that they nearly all treat of landscape. "Crawford Lodge," "The Four Seasons," Pitlessie Mill," "Sheep in a Meadow," "A Rustic Cottage" make up the principal subjects of the collection. These juvenile sketches, Cunningham points out, though they are somewhat unfinished, have certain indisputable marks of exact drawing.

Sir David Wilkie

David Martin's advice weighed with Wilkie's father in the permission granted to the young artist to carry on his studies in Edinburgh. The *To Edinburgh Trustees' Academy* was the second of its kind in the capital, while in Glasgow, previous to the rise of the second Edinburgh school, there had existed the "Academy of the Fine Arts," directed by the brothers Foulis. The first of the Edinburgh drawing schools was the Academy of St. Luke, established in 1729. It numbered the Ramsays, father and son, in its list of members. Its prospectus stated in some detail the aims of this Academy. "Every one," are its words, "that inclines, on application to our Director and Council, shall be admitted on paying a small sum for defraying charges of Figure and Lights, etc." The summer session was to be devoted to "Drawing from Antique Models and Draughts of the best Masters of Foraigne Schools by a Sky Light." This Academy based its regulations upon the Academy of St. Luke at Rome: hence its name. Several public men of the time, especially Sir George Clerk Maxwell and Sir Robert Strange, are thought to have had a share in its maintenance; but their support of it is improbable. The University was the scene of the last meeting of the Academy; nothing is heard of it after the summer of 1731. Twenty-nine years later a similar institution, which was entitled "The Select Society," had for its founder Allan Ramsay, the painter, some leading Edinburgh citizens assisting him to carry it on.

The Trustees' Academy

This soon developed into an ambitious corporation, and received the imposing name of "A Society for the encouragement of Arts, Sciences, Manufactures, and Agriculture." It slowly but steadily prospered under judicious guidance. At the outset a French teacher held the mastership; he was followed by another Frenchman, and then, in turn, Alexander Runciman and David Allan succeeded to the office. After them John Graham was master, and he had held the appointment about a year when young Wilkie sought to be enrolled as a pupil. The name of the institution had come to be "The Trustees' Academy," because of its direction having devolved upon a Board of Trustees.

An unexpected barrier presented itself to young Wilkie's ambition. He was at first refused the honour of studentship. George Thomson, Burns's collaborator in the lyrical *Collection*, was the secretary of the Academy, and it fell to him to decide upon the qualifications of aspirants. The ordeal of examining candidates in drawing must have been severe for one whose sole credentials to eminence rested on a zealous love of music. It is commonly granted that Thomson was right in condemning Wilkie's probationary sketches, which he thought poor "in colour and in perspective." But it is perhaps quite as fair to conclude that he was unfitted to discern the lurking genius of these boyish attempts. Fortunately, the Earl of Leven, who did have an appreciation of Wilkie's talent, interposed, and no further delay occurred in the lad's being accepted as a pupil. Speedily he made evi-

*Student-
ship*



Sir David Wilkie

dent his claim to be considered a youth of no ordinary powers, and his career at the Academy became a record of honourable success. John Burnet, who was a fellow-student, speaks of Wilkie's sober assiduity in his tasks. "He was always first on the stairs at Graham's Academy," says Burnet. "His intenseness," he continues, "attracted the more volatile students, who used to pelt him with small pills of soft bread. . . . Afterwards Wilkie invariably retired to his lodging, there to follow out what was begun in the Academy by copying from his own hands and face in a mirror." Graham, the master of the Academy, was a man of ability and tact.

John A painting of his on "The Death of David
Graham Rizzio" enjoyed no slight repute; another, describing "The Death of General Fraser," was much admired by Wilkie, who in his later years constantly kept an engraving of it in his study. Graham introduced reforms into the methods of the Academy, one of these being the use of oils; and he had that invaluable gift as a teacher, the knack of inspiring his pupils with an enthusiasm for study. The fact that he turned out such artists as Wilkie, Sir William Allan, Sir John Watson Gordon, and John Burnet, alone speaks volumes for Graham's capability.

More than once Wilkie competed for a prize offered by the master of the Academy for the best drawing. In a competition of this sort, the subject was to be selected at the student's discretion from "Macbeth." Wilkie chose the scene at Macduff's castle, where Lady Macduff endeavours to defend her little son from

Student Drawings

his assailants. Burnet and Thomson, a brother of George Thomson, also entered for the prize. Thomson obtained a good deal of effect in his interpretation of the gloomy landscape, principally through his skilful management of the flashing light of torches. The prize fell to Thomson, though Wilkie's picture was honoured with a word of genuine approbation from Graham. The sketch of Lady Macduff, and the general form of the picture, are said to have been commonplace; but the expression on the boy's face was so excellent that Graham predicted that Wilkie would yet arrive at eminence from his powerful delineation of nature. In a second competition, Wilkie was awarded the prize, his picture being "Diana and Calisto." In this instance, however, Graham brought up an adverse point of criticism. Calisto was made to blush with so deep a colour that he descanted to his students on the difficulty of introducing the peculiarities of familiar life into the so-called higher branches of the art.

Throughout his student days, Wilkie, it can be judged, was keenly stimulated by a sense of the high charge of his calling. The all-pervading love of his art, which in his later years shocked a solemn company by a reference to the rare pictorial qualities of a city-marshal's hat, profoundly actuated him from the first. This he manifested at Edinburgh not only in an intelligent and painstaking devotion to academic rules, but

*Student
Drawings*

*The
Artist's
Calling*

Sir David Wilkie

in a familiar and appreciative study of life itself. Lockhart, who to a certain extent speaks from personal knowledge, has, in a *Quarterly Review* article, an allusion to this fact that is worthy of attention. He says:—"The even, resolute steadiness of his diligence is attested by the master, and by two or three of his fellow-students, themselves in the sequel distinguished. He was the first at the school, and the last to leave it; and the intervening hours were spent in solitary labour in his little garret in the old town of Edinburgh, near the College—or in observing and sketching from life, moving, bustling life, in the market-place, the auction-rooms, on the quays of Leith, among the fishermen and their wives, in the vast stone-quarries near the city—wherever he could see human beings exerting their strength, mixing with each other, and transacting real business. If he had a holiday, it was given to some fair or *tryst* for the sale of cattle in the neighbourhood, where mountaineers from the North or the South, Gael or Saxon, in their as yet picturesque diversity of costume, were trafficking or carousing in the midst of flocks and herds, and strings of rough ponies. From such studies he returned with quickened and enlightened curiosity to the casts from the antique at the Academy, which were not many, and 'so much the better for me,' said Wilkie, 'for I had to work on them until I had got everything about them by heart.' He had a natural turn for mechanism—kept carpenter's tools always by him, and, while meditating on his teacher's lessons, delighted to occupy his hands by fashioning shelves,

“The Village Politicians”

stools, a chair, or a table, whatever was wanted to make his nook more comfortable.”

A delighted observation of human life and human nature was thus an early acquired condition of Wilkie's art. The story of Wilkie as a struggling artist playing a tune on his fiddle, as the only acceptable reward, to an old man who sat to him as a model, is full of suggestion, and proves that his standpoint as a romantic painter was quickly attained.

Wilkie's predisposition to *genre* subjects, and the free play given to his fancy during his apprenticeship, were soon to reap practical results. As a student he placed to his credit the authorship of *Genius in the bud* three clever sketches of familiar life. These were the first draught of “The Village Politicians,” a sketch from *The Gentle Shepherd*, and a scene from Home's tragedy of *Douglas*. The material for “The Village Politicians” was taken—so far as much-beautified material can be said to be taken—from Hector Macneill's ballad of “Scotland's Skaith, or the History o' Will and Jean.” Wilkie's picture deals with merely an isolated portion of the narrative, which is a tale of the evils of intemperance. The picture's force is concentrated upon that passage which describes a band of worthies, whose resort is the village change-house, quarrelling over social asperities. From the characteristics of the central group of this sketch little departure is made in the two important replicas that followed it. The head of the presiding old man remains almost the same in them; nor does much difference occur in the

Sir David Wilkie

drawing of his three controversial companions. The first of these developments of "The Village Politicians" was made by Wilkie immediately after he produced the sketch. It caused surprise and admiration alike among his comrades, and founded his reputation as a painter of *genre*. The second copy he made his preliminary venture after his arrival in London.

The sketch from *The Gentle Shepherd* deals with that part of the drama where Sir William Worthy is represented returning from exile, and coming unexpectedly upon his son and a number of rustics keeping holiday. Its noteworthy features are its skill of expression and its vivid colouring. The transcript from *Douglas* does not rank so high as its two companion sketches. It is concerned with the meeting of Douglas and the hermit. It was not a theme that could have stirred Wilkie, and the grandiosity of the verse may have lent a touch of its sentiment to the artist's handiwork.

Wilkie left the Trustees' Academy at the age of eighteen, and returned to the manse of Cults. Some time later he received a remarkable testimonial from Graham, which is couched in the form of a letter to the young artist's father. Graham's summing-up reflects the greatest credit on Wilkie's accomplishments, and is interesting from what is said on the debated question of Wilkie's power as a historical painter. Graham concludes in these terms:—"I have seen some doubts expressed by the critics, whether his talents were equal to the higher line

“Pitlessie Fair”

of art. They know him not. He is capable of carrying through the most elevated and elegant part of his art, perhaps with as much success as those subjects from which he has merited so much praise. The more delicacy required in the execution of a subject, the more successful he will be. In some of his first essays in painting when with me, he then evinced a degree of taste which bore a great resemblance to the manner of Correggio, who ranks amongst the highest masters of the art.”

Settled at Cults, Wilkie at once devised plans for pursuing his professional work. Two methods of action lay before him, and he prepared to adopt them. He resolved to proceed farther with the species of painting he had so happily begun in “The Village Politicians”; this he did in a spirit of intense appreciation. He also made up his mind to practise portrait-painting, because of its utilitarian side. Scrupulously impartial in conjoining the two systems, he was justified in the deed. Shortly after his return to Cults, he apprised a fellow-student in Edinburgh of his satisfactory progress with a picture which he named “The Country Fair.” “I have,” he adds, “the advantage of our herd-boy and some children who live about *“Pitlessie Fair”* the place as standers; and I can see how superior painting from nature is to anything that our imagination, assisted by our memory, can conceive.” As the sequel showed, he had many other living models, conscious or otherwise, for his contemplated picture. His scheme expanded into a large and complex one,

Sir David Wilkie

and he spared no effort to develop it. The village of Pitlessie, which was the scene of "The Country Fair" (afterwards named "Pitlessie Fair"), is situated about a mile to the westward of Cults manse. It is a small community yet, numbering not more than five hundred inhabitants. Probably its bounds and population have not altered much since Wilkie's day. It has no longer a fair, for village fairs, like other picturesque observances, have disappeared to a marked extent in Scotland, in face of the more rigid economic conditions. The fair of Ceres, the neighbouring village to Pitlessie, and a larger place, vanished during the closing years of the nineteenth century. But, the centre of a fine agricultural district, Pitlessie must of old time have been both convenient and attractive as a market meeting-place, and the natural features of the scene merit their commemoration by Wilkie's pencil. He toiled as unflinchingly as he did in maturer years to gain an accurate knowledge of the locality of his projected painting. He visited Pitlessie, and made an exact working sketch of the place; and, then, after he had drawn in rough masses the groups of a market-day, he was ready for throwing his studies upon the canvas.

For his first deliberate effort as a painter, he had no meagre difficulties to overcome. So primitive, *Crude* for example, was his stock of requisites that *Para-* he could not boast an easel; but he ingeniously utilised a chest of drawers for his *phernalia* purpose. Pulling out the centre drawer, he rested the lower end of his canvas upon it, leaving the upper



"The Village Politicians" (p. 42).



“Pitlessie Fair”

part against the cornice. The quest of models, when his picture grew upon him, gave him endless trouble. Strong objections were raised by some of those whom he wished as sitters. To capture the lineaments of such persons, he had occasionally resource to stratagem. It is recorded that a recalcitrant sitter, whose portrait was coveted, fell asleep during sermon under the vigilant eye of the artist; the opportunity was not missed, and the desired sketch was satisfactorily made on the blank leaf of a Bible. The minister himself was given a place in the picture, though he did not greatly relish the compliment. He was mollified by the assurance that he was drawn in the commendable act of chastening the reprobate.

Critics are unanimous regarding the wonderful excellence of “Pitlessie Fair,” especially as the achievement of a lad of nineteen. Wilkie, after he had painted pictures which have been more abundantly praised, estimated it with perfect justice as in some ways not inferior to these. “Although,” he said, “it is no doubt very badly painted, it has more subject, and more entertainment in it than any other three pictures I have since produced.” It contains no fewer than a hundred and forty figures. There is, besides, a real variety of incident. Yet, densely packed as it is, the composition is free and convincing. Farmers, soldiers, hucksters, children—the later picture of “The Jew’s Harp” is here a group in little—with animals and other accessories not a few, are presented dramatically, and with astonishing truthfulness and vigour. The colouring is rather crude,

Sir David Wilkie

the warm hues undeniably so. Yet the picture is neither slovenly nor amateurish, nor generally tentative in handling. Had Wilkie done nothing more than "Pitlessie Fair," he must still have been accounted a considerable painter. Mr. Kinnear, of Kinloch, who had commissioned him to paint a picture for £25, was so much pleased with the excellence of "Pitlessie Fair," which was produced in answer to his commission, that he raised the price to £40.

Alongside of his work on "Pitlessie Fair" Wilkie painted the bright picture originally called "The Bounty Money, or the Village Recruit," but afterwards known under the sole title of "*The Village Recruit*." This painting is much less ambitious than "Pitlessie Fair," but its composition and drawing are of fine quality. The scene is the room of a country inn. Two soldiers are describing to a group of rustics the glories attending military service, while a recruit, seated on a table, keeps his eye upon a waiter who is drawing the cork out of a bottle of ale. By the fire an old man sits smoking. The arrangement of the figures is done with the skilful ease that is never absent from Wilkie's compositions.

His stay at Cults in these probationary days led to the drawing of a few other sketches, of essentially less value than the two gems which had a large share in spreading his early fame. Three of them are particularly good. The first is a water-colour sketch of the beadle of Cults, as he comes home

Youthful Sketches

at evening from his labour ; his dog is at his heels, and his wife awaits him at their cottage door. The artist is said to have been little more than eleven when he sketched this. The second of these sketches, also a water-colour, is a scene from *The Gentle Shepherd*. The third picture, which is in Indian ink, portrays a shipwreck. The sea is lashed with storm ; a dismantled ship is drifting upon rocks, and a horseman has plunged into the waves to rescue two sailors. To this sketch the artist has affixed his signature. Portraits also engaged the artist's attention as a lad at the manse of Cults. He did these both in life-size and miniature. Miss Hardie, of Pitlessie, a cousin of Wilkie's, owns a beautiful miniature of her mother belonging to this part of Wilkie's career. Mrs. Shand, of Northumberland Street, Edinburgh, another relative of the painter, has interesting sketches of female heads drawn at this time. Various local gentry gave him sittings for full-size canvases. Among the best of these is a graceful portrait of Mrs. Graham, of Greigston, now the property of her grandson, Major Graham Bonar. Wilkie wished for wider fields, and he tried successively Kinghorn, St. Andrews, and Aberdeen. Meeting with scanty encouragement, he determined to increase his training and improve his fortunes by going to London. After opposition his father yielded to his persistent eagerness, and accordingly Wilkie sailed from Leith on the 20th of May 1805.

CHAPTER III.

EARLY SUCCESSES.

Life in London—The Royal Academy classes—Fellow-students—B. R. Haydon—Jackson—Visits to galleries—Introduced to Lord Mansfield—"The Village Politicians"—Sir George Beaumont—Professor Knight's *Memorials of Coleorton*—Lord Mulgrave—"Alfred in the Neatherd's Cottage"—"The Blind Fiddler"—"The Card Players"—"The Rent Day"—"The Clubbists"—"The New Coat"—Commission from Lord Lansdowne—"The Sick Lady"—The Elgin Marbles—"The Village Festival"—John Burnet—At Coleorton—"The Gipsy Mother."

WILKIE entered the schools of the Royal Academy about a month after his arrival in London. He was admitted as a probationer, but ranked as a regular student in the following December. He brought with him from Scotland the sum of £60, made up of his payment for "Pitlessie Fair" and of fees for portrait-painting. With this he trusted that he should be able to support himself until he might add to it by the sale of pictures. He took lodgings at 8 Norton Street (afterwards Bolsover Street), changing before long to 10 Sol's Row, Hampstead Road. He created a stir in art circles by a small picture which he forthwith exhibited for sale in a dealer's window near Charing Cross. This is supposed

B. R. Haydon

to have been "The Village Recruit," which was probably conveyed with him to London. It was bought by an unknown customer for £6. Wilkie's attendance at the drawing-class of the Royal Academy brought him before the notice of such prominent academicians as Flaxman, Fuseli, and Northcote. Among the students he also began friendships which ripened into life-long permanence. Several of these youths were men of future distinction: *Fellow-students* Haydon, Mulready, Collins, and Jackson. Haydon's friendship with Wilkie, particularly in the days when they were both young and eager adventurers, is of singular and striking interest; it was instantaneous and complete; and, though at times there was a jarring note on the part of Haydon—a note of dissonance emphasised as the years passed—it never underwent absolute change. The two men were doubtless attracted through the predominant quality of their natures—their splendid integrity. *B. R. Haydon* Keats has consecrated this quality of Haydon's in lines of his noblest verse. In a sonnet addressed to Haydon, he records his friend's

"High-mindedness, a jealousy for good."

A second sonnet of similar import sets Haydon, in an illustrious description, beside Wordsworth and Leigh Hunt as representative intellectual leaders of their epoch:—

"Great spirits now on earth are sojourning :
He of the cloud, the cataract, the lake,

Sir David Wilkie

Who on Helvellyn's summit, wide awake,
Catches his freshness from Archangel's wing :
He of the rose, the violet, the spring,
The social smile, the chain for freedom's sake :
And lo ! whose steadfastness would never take
A meaner sound than Raphael's whispering."

Haydon had also the sincere esteem of Wordsworth and of Mrs. Browning, who each honoured him by the inscription of verse in his praise, alike as an artist and as a man. Wilkie's excellence of disposition, less assertive than Haydon's, impinged less weightily than his upon an observer's mind. There was sweetness rather than force and energy of moral enthusiasm in his nature. But he fully shared the spiritual sanity of his devoted friend. Scott, Haydon himself, and a host besides, never wearied of celebrating his unimpeachable worth. But the two men were otherwise decidedly unlike. Wilkie was equable in temper, diffident of his powers, flexible in matters of general opinion ; Haydon was endowed with attributes quite the reverse of these : he was rash, dogmatic, intolerant. Nevertheless, each existed to the other as a clear-shining, honourable personality ; and this affinity, recognised from the outset between them, did not cease to inspire them to the end.

Haydon, whose life had a close and curious relation to Wilkie's, was the son of a Plymouth bookseller, and was bound to his father's business. But he determined that "he must be a painter" ; and, with lofty and intense but ill-directed ideas of historical painting, settled in London a year before Wilkie. Northcote

Jackson

warned him that if he persisted in the notions he fostered about art he would starve "with a bundle of straw under his head." No augury was ever more terribly fulfilled.

Mulready and Collins do not figure so visibly as Jackson in Wilkie's introductory years of London life. Jackson, who was somewhat the senior of the group, was a native of Yorkshire, where *Jackson* he had been employed as a working tailor.

His turn for drawing impressed Lord Mulgrave, and he was also encouraged in his love of art by Sir George Beaumont. One of these patrons—probably Lord Mulgrave, though accounts differ on the point—advised him to go to London, assuring him of a competence of £50 a year during his studentship. He deservedly rose to the greatest popularity as a portrait-painter. Jackson has an interesting reminiscence of Wilkie's appearance as a youth. He says, "he was tall and thin, with blue and uncommonly bright eyes, a nose rather short, and a mouth full of humour of the quietest and richest kind."

Wilkie's letters of this period naturally tell much of the matters nearest his heart. As soon as opportunity offered he studied the works in the Royal Academy Exhibition and elsewhere. Of the *Visits to Galleries* Academy historical paintings, he liked most the canvas by West, entitled "Thetis bringing Armour to Achilles." Opie in portraiture did not impress him. He was disappointed that he failed to see any collection of Barry's pictures. A visit to West's house

Sir David Wilkie

deepened his previous admiration of that artist's ability. Chiefly did he applaud the correctness of West's drawing. But his critical discernment did not shrink from finer decisions. This passage from a letter to a friend in Scotland says much for the perception and knowledge of the observer :—

“ I have been seeing a gallery of pictures by Morland, which please me very much indeed. He seems to have copied nature in everything, and in a manner peculiar to himself. When you look at his pictures you see in them the very same figures that we see here every day in the streets, which, from the variety and looseness in their dress, form an appearance that is truly picturesque, and much superior to our peasantry in Scotland. I have also seen some pictures by Teniers, which for clear touching certainly go to the height of human perfection in art : they make all other pictures look misty beside them. As for Turner, whom you have heard Allan speak of, I do not at all understand his method of painting : his designs are grand, the effect and colouring natural, but his manner of handling is not to my taste ; and although his pictures are not large, you must see them from the other end of the room before they can satisfy the eye.”

While diligently pursuing the necessary studies in the drawing school and elsewhere, Wilkie was not blind to the practical aspect of his position. His stout self-reliance was scarcely less creditable than his intellectual resource ; his unwavering resolution was threatened only during a single gloomy hour, when he



"The Blind Fiddler" (p 49).

34

“The Village Politicians”

contemplated the probability of returning to Scotland and falling to “his old trade.” A chance visit to a piano-forte dealer, named Stodart, proved a fortunate event. Stodart had business relations with the Earl of Mansfield, and, through admiration of the young artist’s attainments, as well as from the fact that his wife belonged to the Midlothian Wilkie stock, proffered his good offices with respect to an introduction to the Scottish nobleman. An opportunity speedily came. The Dowager Countess of Mansfield having chanced to call at Stodart’s warehouse, was shown “Pitlessie Fair,” which Wilkie, through Mr. Kinnear’s courtesy, had been able to include among his London credentials. She was struck with it, and her visit was followed by one from her son, the Earl, who asked the picture to be sent to his house for exhibition to his friends. Thereafter Wilkie was requested to meet Lord Mansfield at his residence, and was promised by the Earl all the help that his patronage could effect.

*Introduced
to Lord
Mansfield*

“The Village Politicians”—Wilkie’s third and greatest picture of that name—was the immediate sequel of this introduction. In April 1806 he wrote to his father of its rapid progress. It was ready for the Royal Academy Exhibition of that year, and was well hung. A dispute between the Earl and the painter, unfortunately, marred the auspicious start which Wilkie had thus made with commissions. At the interview at which the order for the picture was given there was no clear

*“The
Village
Politicians”*

Sir David Wilkie

stipulation as to payment. Wilkie mentioned fifteen guineas quite vaguely. The Earl's statement of the price that he was willing to pay was equally indefinite. But he suggested that the painter might consult his friends. There is no doubt, however, that Lord Mansfield believed that the picture was his at the price of fifteen guineas, and that he saw no reason, from a business point of view, why he should recede from the arrangement. At the same time, there is a good deal to be said for Wilkie's position in the matter. Throughout his career he was never in the habit of putting even an adequate charge upon his pictures, far less of pricing them too highly. The sum of fifteen guineas was a ludicrously low price. It is not surprising, therefore, that urged by a consciousness of ability, and, prompted by friends, he should have hoped for a higher remuneration than he accepted when an obscure aspirant. At the end of an almost acrimonious correspondence, Wilkie acknowledged that he was wrong, and Lord Mansfield not ungenerously paid him thirty guineas.

By "The Village Politicians" the reputation of the painter was at once established in London. The sensation it produced is said to have been electrical, and to be compared without exaggeration to that which ensued upon the publication of *Childe Harold*. It was noticed in brief but flattering terms by the critic in *The News*. "A young man," he said, "by the name of Wilkie, a Scotchman, has a very extraordinary work." The praise was wholly warranted. The picture maintained

Sir George Beaumont

the best qualities of "Pitlessie Fair," and outshone it in expressiveness of character and beauty of finish.

On the merits of "The Village Politicians," previous to its exhibition, Jackson, in converse with Sir George Beaumont and Lord Mulgrave, held that its author was "second to no Dutchman that ever bore palette." This enthusiastic eulogy provoked a visit to Wilkie from these two generous lovers of art. This visit, especially in the case of Sir George Beaumont, was of deep moment to Wilkie. Between him and Beaumont there sprang up a cordial and lasting intimacy that affords unmixed pleasure in its contemplation. It is perfectly and justly reminiscent of Mæcenas and the brave Augustan ways. The meeting of Wilkie with these patrons of art had its primary consequence in a commission from each of his visitors. Sir George Beaumont's quick eye must have decided without hesitation that the work of the young Scotsman gave evidence of powers of no common order. When stating his wishes regarding a picture, he offered as payment fifty guineas, a much higher figure than the artist probably yet dreamed of for his paintings.

Sir George Beaumont and Lord Mulgrave were both outstanding men in English social life. Beaumont had skill as an artist, as well as other accomplishments, and is famous in literary history as the friend of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and of Scott and Southey. He was, moreover, the originator of the National Gallery. He belonged to the stock of Beaumont, the dramatist. He had a

Sir David Wilkie

residence at Coleorton, Leicestershire, and another at Dunmow, Essex, both of which were, in a marked degree, centres of intellectual life and charm. Wordsworth's friendly association with Beaumont is a feature of the literary history of the pre-Victorian period. Beaumont drew illustrations for "The White Doe of Rylstone," "The Thorn," "Lucy Gray," and "Peter Bell," while Wordsworth composed poems on scenes at Coleorton, and on pictures by his friend. The 1815 edition of Wordsworth's poems was dedicated to Sir George; in the dedication the poet remarks that "some of the best pieces were composed under the shades of your own groves, upon the classic ground of Coleorton; where I was animated by the recollection of those illustrious poets of your name and family who were born in that neighbourhood. Nor is there any one to whom such parts of this collection, as have been inspired or coloured by the beautiful country from which I now address you, could be presented with more propriety than to yourself, to whom it has suggested so many beautiful pictures." Among Wordsworth's poems composed at Coleorton were the "Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle," "Gipsies," the lines addressed to the nightingale beginning

" O nightingale ! thou surely art
A creature of a fiery heart,"

and various sonnets, as that with the grand prelude—

" Two voices are there ; one is of the sea,
One of the mountains."

Wordsworth's poetical relationship to Beaumont's

“Memorials of Coleorton”

work as an artist is memorably exemplified by the fact that to Sir George's pencil were due the “Elegiac Stanzas suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle in a Storm,” with that immortal reflection—

“The light that never was on sea or land,
The consecration, and the Poet's dream.”

In *Memorials of Coleorton*, an extremely valuable contribution to English biographical literature of the nineteenth century, Professor Knight has added much to the general knowledge of the personal history of Wordsworth and Coleridge. These *Memorials* consist for the most part of letters which passed between the two poets and Sir George Beaumont. Both poets freely discussed in their epistolary correspondence with him the original draughts of their poems; and it was to Sir George that Wordsworth communicated the famous statement formulating the idea of his poetic mission. “I doubt not,” he wrote in May 1807, before he published the *Ode to Duty*, “that you will share with me an invincible confidence that my writings (and among them these little poems) will co-operate with the benign tendencies in human nature and society, wherever found; and that they will, in their degree, be efficacious in making men wiser, better, and happier.” To the same recipient, nominally for Lady Beaumont's perusal, Coleridge sent the manuscript of his “Hymn before Sunrise, in the Vale of Chamouni.” From Beaumont's own part of this correspondence, as from his many letters to Wilkie, it can be seen that he was possessed of rare culture and

Sir David Wilkie

soundness of judgment. Simply to have scanned these *Memorials* would surely have saved Sir Walter Armstrong from the airy assumption that Beaumont, who sometimes entertained guests with his recitals from the dramatists—Southey said he would have made an excellent actor—"must have been a stupendous prig."

For Lord Mulgrave, who is described by Haydon as "a fine character, manly, perfectly bred, and as noble an example of his order as I ever knew," Wilkie painted a small picture which he called "Sunday Morning." Before fulfilling his commission he stayed at Mulgrave for a few weeks in the summer of 1806. His return to London saw him busy with the much more important commission of "The Blind Fiddler" for Sir George Beaumont. About the same time he was working at a picture suggested to him by Alexander Davison, a wealthy Government contractor, who was making a collection of paintings by British artists on subjects "selected from the history of England." "Alfred in the Neatherd's Cottage." In certain respects the picture was a success, but it failed in its presentation of the figure of Alfred, which, it has been generally allowed, warranted Sir George Beaumont's charge of insipidity. The rest of the characters, all of them more in the style to which the artist had hitherto accustomed himself, were expressively drawn. Lockhart avers that the features of the

“The Blind Fiddler”

clown might be estimated as the best portrait in existence of Wilkie himself. The artist was paid for it 150 guineas.

“The Blind Fiddler” was ready for the Royal Academy exhibition of 1807. There, like its predecessor, “The Village Politicians,” it was the cynosure of all eyes. It is with reference to this picture that there may be noticed the preliminary symptoms of that supposed jealousy on the part of Academicians which was about to disturb Wilkie’s peace of mind, and to drive Haydon to wildly argumentative protest. Whatever may have been the facts, the story as it has been handed down, must be considered *Academic Jealousy* largely apocryphal. The legend is to the effect that on varnishing day, Turner, whose picture of “The Blacksmith’s Forge” was hung next to Wilkie’s, added a dash of brightness to his own work “to put the Scotchman’s nose out of joint, who has gained such reputation by his ‘Village Politicians.’” It is hinted that he did so with the connivance of members of the Academy. Cunningham lends his sanction to this story, but Lockhart condemns it as absurd. Lockhart’s view must be accepted as correct. Cunningham did not hesitate to throw down the glove to the Royal Academicians on very intangible grounds, and this allegation is assuredly not supported by the evidence. It might indeed be reasonably concluded that Cunningham had never seen “The Blacksmith’s Forge,” which he thus asserts to have been manipulated to the detriment of Wilkie’s new picture. The opinion of the Redgraves

Sir David Wilkie

concerning this story will convince an impartial observer. In *A Century of Painters*, they remark :—" Instead of a red and blazing forge, as we might expect, a burst of grey smoke, and the palest of yellow flames, is all that the bellows of Turner's art has blown on this occasion, and every one will see that the colour of Wilkie's work is of the two the most ' overpowering ' ; the only red in Turner's picture—the cap of the butcher—being far less in quality than that of the fiddler, carried out as it is by the red waistcoat of the delighted peasant playing with his child."

The model for the chief personage in the picture of "The Blind Fiddler," Wilkie's mother said, was a wandering Fife minstrel of his boyhood's recollection. Raimbach, on the other hand, believed that this character was carefully studied from a mendicant, well known in London, whose customary haunt was Oxford Street. Very likely the painter found suggestions in both sources. Raimbach's allusion makes it probable that the musician of Oxford Street may have been the identical hero of Wordsworth's vivacious stanzas. It is at all events interesting to notice from a letter of Wordsworth's to Sir George Beaumont that his curiosity was aroused by this picture. Picture and poem, it may be added, were before the public almost contemporaneously. Wordsworth writes :—" I long to see Wilkie's picture. From Lady Beaumont's account, it seems to have surpassed your utmost expectations. I am glad of this, both because the picture is



"The Rent Day" (p. 51).



“The Blind Fiddler”

yours, and as it is an additional promise of what he is to do hereafter. No doubt you will read him my Orpheus of Oxford Street, which I think he will like.”

By “The Blind Fiddler” the reputation of the painter was so increased as to become virtually independent of criticism. Sir George Beaumont’s satisfaction was great, and it is very certain that *Fame Won* had he not already presented Wilkie with Hogarth’s mahl-stick, because of the merit of “The Village Politicians,” he would have done so now. West avowed that he had never in his experience met with a young artist like him. “He may be young in years,” he said, “but he is old in the experience of his art. I consider him an honour to the country.” While following the Dutch school, as represented by Adrian van Ostade, this picture excels in the graceful and delicate expressiveness of its figures any examples whatsoever of that school. It is a triumphant practical proof of Wilkie’s theory of the propriety of founding art upon nature.

The scene is simplicity itself. A blind fiddler of the strolling tribe once not uncommon has entered the house of a country shoemaker ; and, seated by the fire, earnestly discourses music to his rustic audience. Beside him is his wife, depicted with the dull, hard face of her class. They are accompanied by two children, one of whom reclines in the mother’s arms ; the other stands by the fire. The master of the house and his wife, who holds in her arms a merry infant, are admirably rendered. The father snaps his fingers, and smiles to

Sir David Wilkie

the child, on whom the mother looks with fond contemplation. A few other personages go to compose a vivid and deftly-managed group. It was considered on its production as an undeniable masterpiece. Sir George Beaumont alone of the critics of the time passed a word of adverse criticism. Yet his objections, that there was "a metallic appearance in some parts of the drapery of the woman with the child, and round the blind man, also, a sort of slaty smoothness," could only bulk, even to the critic himself, as the merest specks on the sun.¹

Wilkie's assured success—success gained, it is worth recollecting, at the age of twenty-two—led him to think of visiting Scotland. Thither he departed by sea in the spring of 1807. His health, however, had begun to suffer, and he was no sooner at Cults than he was laid aside with fever. Though protracted, his illness was not serious, and he made a good recovery. At this trying time, he was duly encouraged by the unfailing kindness of Sir George Beaumont, who cheered him with letters full of disinterested and manly counsel. Jackson, too, regularly corresponded with him. With returning health, the artist wished to be again at his easel. He was back in London in October, and straightway bestirred himself over fresh engagements. These were "The Card Players," which the Duke of

¹ In consequence of his ill-advised use of asphaltum in mixing his oils, the surface of many of Wilkie's important pictures has become scarred. Even the "Blind Fiddler" has not escaped.

“The Rent Day”

Gloucester had commissioned, and “The Rent Day,” painted for Lord Mulgrave.

In “The Card Players,” Wilkie may be said to have had distinctly in his mind, and in practice to have made little departure from, the conventional style of the Dutch *genre* school. It holds a place, “*The Card Players*” at the same time, among the most careful of his paintings. He received for it 150 guineas. “The Rent Day” reveals him once more as an artist alike original and powerful. Dr. Waagen, “*The Rent Day*” whose critical authority is of the utmost weight, declares that “for refinement of motive, individuality of expression, clearness and power of colouring, and solid execution and rendering of forms,” this picture was the finest he knew of Wilkie’s. It describes a scene in the hall of a landlord’s house on the occasion of the farmers’ payment of rent. The factor presides; round him, in various attitudes, which are telling enough, are stationed the tenants of the manor lands. The two principal figures are the factor and a young farmer, who are seated together at a table; the farmer is worrying the official upon a tough clause of settlement. Two other figures—an old man waiting for the moment to pay down his money, and a middle-aged man, standing near, evidently engaged in a piece of dubious calculation—are excellently conceived and drawn. A widow, with two children, and a separate group—the admission of which into the picture rises superior to any supposed infringement of the law of pictorial art—supplies a farcical element in

Sir David Wilkie

the situation. This group is made up of an attendant and a farmer or two who are being supplied with food and liquor.

Few of Wilkie's paintings contain so many actual portraits as "The Rent Day." It was designed and the rough sketch made at Mulgrave. There the artist obtained, without exception, the models for his picture. When exhibited at the Great Exhibition at Dublin in 1853 (so Lord Ronald Gower states), this picture engrossed the attention of Queen Victoria ; she was accompanied by the Hon. Colonel Phipps, a member of the Mulgrave family, who acquainted her Majesty with the individuality of the different characters, including the portrait of himself, as a child playing with a key. The elder child represented was afterwards Marquis of Normanby. The factor was a likeness of Peter Merry, a well-known man in the neighbourhood of Mulgrave. The two prominent figures standing were drawn from a father and son, Womptra by name. The widow was a portrait of Jenny Dale, the nurse of Lord Mulgrave's children. The butler drawing the cork was a servant in Lord Mulgrave's employment ; while the two farmers seated were residents near Mulgrave, William Lawson (who munches a stick) and John Lang (who is coughing) —the second of these presentments forming, according to Hazlitt, a piece of the most skilful technique.

Lord Mulgrave signified his warm approval of Wilkie's performance in "The Rent Day" by paying him 150 guineas instead of the fifty guineas for which he bargained. It has since been sold for 2000 guineas.

The Lansdownes

Neither "The Rent Day" nor "Alfred in the Neat-herd's Cottage" was sent to the Royal Academy of 1808. The painter contented himself with submitting only "The Card Players" to popular criticism. During this year he also painted for Lord Mulgrave a portrait of Lady Mary Fitzgerald. Through Haydon he became known to Leigh Hunt, for whom he executed his clever painting of "The Clubbists." "The New Coat" was painted in response to a commission from his old friend Stodart.

In the summer of 1808 Wilkie had a visit from Lord and Lady Lansdowne, their special object being to arrange for a portrait of Lady Lansdowne. Lord Lansdowne expressed a wish to *The Lans-* purchase when finished a picture at which *downes* Wilkie was working. This was "The Sick Lady," a voluntarily imposed undertaking. During a stay of three weeks at Southampton Castle, a country residence of Lord Lansdowne's, Wilkie painted the portrait of the Marchioness. "The Sick Lady," completed shortly afterwards, cannot be called a successful effort. There is too much passivity in the scene to draw a sympathetic delineation from Wilkie's pencil. The effect is not so much one of delicacy as of futility.

It was about this date that Wilkie took Haydon to see the Elgin Marbles, and thereby secured for these sculptures a concentrated earnest- *The Elgin* ness of public attention which they would *Marbles* not otherwise have so readily gained. He called upon his friend when he was in much perplexity as to

Sir David Wilkie

the proper drawing for his heroic figure of "Dentatus," and the impression produced on Haydon's mind by a contemplation of the Marbles was instantaneous and profound. "Utterly disgusted," he says, "with my wretched attempt at the heroic in the form and action of my 'Dentatus,' I dashed out the abominable mass, and breathed as if relieved of a nuisance." The pity of it is that Haydon's manipulation of the brush fell so decidedly short of his acute and vigorous perception. Yet the discovery made by Wilkie and himself as to the rare beauty of these Grecian models enchanted the fancy of both, and engaged their attention during months of close and systematic study.

Haydon, in his *Autobiography* of those days, is full of the satisfaction he felt in Wilkie's good fellowship.

The Two Friends The chronicle of this year yields a number of pleasant glimpses of their buoyant ambitions and their zest of life. Here is a typical passage :—

"Began my picture again. Wilkie breakfasted with me, on his return from Lord Lansdowne's, a portrait of whose lady he has brought home which is truly exquisite; I had no idea of his being capable of so much; it gives me real pleasure."

Another passage of these recollections is this:—

"In the evening, I wanted to go and see *Macbeth*; Wilkie, who has no taste for anything tragic, said I wanted firmness; but I know that, if it had been *Mother Goose* or any absurd comicality, he would have had as little firmness."

“The Village Festival”

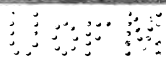
To the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1809 Wilkie sent two pictures, “The Rent Day” and “The Cut Finger.” A third picture, “The Jew’s Harp”—a really clever piece—done at this time, was not exhibited. Both his Academy pictures were well received by the public, though “The Cut Finger” is a work of only minor importance. Its merit consists in its expert drawing of the figure of the old woman. While the exhibition was going on Wilkie commenced “The Village Festival,” a more exacting picture than he had recently attempted. Its original title was “The Ale-house Door.” The artist bestowed strenuous and very constant pains upon it for over a year. From his *Journal* “The Village Festival” it is possible to learn in detail something of the indomitable care which he exercised in its production. Unmistakably, he intended it to be a performance of mark; nor did his ambition overreach itself. The picture, as he hoped it would be, is a surpassing feat. Among the early jottings on the matter in his *Journal* is this entry:—“Was engaged to-day entirely painting the head of the principal figure, which has puzzled me beyond anything, and I cannot get satisfied with it.” Again, he says:—“Made some changes in the arrangement of my ‘Alehouse Door,’ which Haydon approved of.” A concluding entry is as follows:—“Painted to-day the hand of the man smoking behind the landlord, and went over a great part of the man behind the principal figure, to darken the shadows, and strengthen the effect. I sketched in

Sir David Wilkie

some heads about the principal group, which I think has improved it; and I propose to alter the figure behind with the hat in his hand." Dr. Waagen objects to the smallness of the figures, but they are not too small, if regard be paid to the scale; while the careful realisation of the scene, the clear silvery touch of the colouring, and the sprightliness of the composition, command every praise. This painting, if any of Wilkie's may claim to do so, crowns him as a worthy inheritor of the art of Teniers, and of itself distinguishes him as far and away the greatest British master of his style of art.

The circle of Wilkie's friends was notably increasing. About this time he became acquainted with Scott, Coleridge, and Joanna Baillie, and her brother, Dr. Baillie. He now also sought to extend his business relations, and looked for a capable engraver for his pictures. This he discovered in

John John Burnet, his former fellow-student at
Burnet the Edinburgh Trustees' Academy. Burnet had reached London a year later than Wilkie, and was winning distinction through his admirable skill as an engraver. Altogether, Burnet was a man of no ordinary powers, an intelligent if not brilliant painter, and a shrewd and incisive writer upon art. Wilkie made an agreement with him for an engraving of "The Jew's Harp." This print by Burnet was hailed with public approbation, and he afterwards engraved several of Wilkie's most famous pictures, as "The Blind Fiddler," "The Reading of a



"The Jew's Harp" (p. 55).

2001

At Coleorton

Will," "The Rabbit on the Wall," and "The Letter of Introduction."

A tour to Plympton, in Devonshire, the birthplace of Reynolds, and a visit to Coleorton agreeably diversified Wilkie's engrossing toil at his art. In both these excursions he was accompanied *On Tour* by Haydon. Their Devonshire experiences were uneventful; but their stay at Coleorton, as may be guessed from the avowal of each of the visitors, was fraught with keen delights. They did a fair amount of sketching during their fortnight's sojourn. Wilkie sketched the gardener's cottage—an interior—"hitting off this little rustic scene to my satisfaction," he says. He also drew from life the picture of "The Gipsy Mother." Painting and poetry were dominant as topics of conversation. The pleasure afforded by this visit was mutual. Sir George Beaumont wrote to Wilkie after his return to London that the happy memory of the occasion would not speedily pass from his mind, and that he looked forward to the time when the artist was to return to paint a picture.

CHAPTER IV.

ROYAL ACADEMICIAN.

"The Wardrobe Ransacked"—Picture of the Neave family—A. R. A.—Haydon's quarrel with the Royal Academy—Wilkie's withdrawal of "The Wardrobe Ransacked" from the Royal Academy—Ill health—At Dunmow—Completes "The Village Festival"—R. A.—Visit to Cults—Changes his London residence—Holds a private exhibition of his pictures—Death of the Rev. David Wilkie—Mrs. Wilkie and Helen Wilkie settle in London—"Blind Man's Buff"—"The Bagpiper"—"The Letter of Introduction"—"Duncan Gray"—In Paris—"Distraining for Rent"—"The Rabbit on the Wall"—Holiday in the Netherlands—Visit to Hougomont—Arrested at Calais—"The Breakfast"—"Sheep-washing"—Tour in Scotland—"The Abbotsford Family"—Burgess of Cupar—"The Death of Sir Philip Sidney"—"The Penny Wedding."

WILKIE had now removed from 10 Sol's Row to 84 Great Portland Street. He was still closely engaged upon "The Village Festival." As a temporary relief from the strain it imposed he turned to the preparation of a small piece, which has come to be known as "*The Wardrobe Ransacked*." He had also in hand a portrait group for Mr. Thomas Neave, consisting of a representation of members of the Neave family.

A.R.A.

Portrait-painting was entered upon mainly for the sake of a convenient addition to his income. The aim needs no justification ; yet a curious story, affording a good illustration of a quixotism that formerly swayed English art lovers, is told by Wilkie with reference to this engagement. He says in his *Journal* that about the time when he painted the Neave portraits a reputable connoisseur cancelled an order for a picture which he had given him. No reasons were assigned for this step, but Wilkie was convinced that it was due to his devoting his attention to portraiture. It was to all appearance deemed right by the very finical among his contemporaries that an artist should, like Barry, rather make little or no money than obtain it through cultivating that branch of the art which was chosen essentially from its lucrative nature.

In November 1809 Wilkie was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy. The honour was not unexpected, Phillips having previously hinted at its probability to him. Haydon was greatly *A.R.A.* chagrined that the other new associate was Dawe, a mediocre painter, instead of himself. Allied to the fact that his "Dentatus" had been badly placed at this year's Academy Exhibition, the disappointment was more than his irascible temper could frankly bear. From this moment Haydon's life was largely spent in warfare against the Academy, either in painting pictures, utterly defiant of their recognised canons, or in an equally acrid and stormy pamphleteering as to the error of these principles. One of the most violent

Sir David Wilkie

of his attacks was made in a series of letters to the *Examiner*.

Strangely enough, before next year's exhibition at the Royal Academy, a serious misunderstanding occurred between Wilkie and the Academicians. Haydon's observation, jaundiced on such an event, attributed the difficulty to malignant jealousy on the part of the members of the Academy. But it is not necessary, nor is it warrantable, to go so far as that for an explanation. Yet, beyond the cloud of Haydon's exaggerations, it is easy to see that Wilkie, with all his equability and readiness to reasonable concession, did entertain a sense of injustice in his treatment by the Academy at this point in his history.

The incident was this. Wilkie, having far from ended his conscientious labour at "The Village Festival," sent the single picture, "The Wardrobe Ransacked," to the Academy Exhibition of 1809. This painting was slight in conception, but it had considerable merit both in drawing and colouring. It sets forth a humorous scene, in which an old man quizzes a little girl by stepping about a room with her cap on his head. The very name cost the artist nice deliberation. Sir George Beaumont sought to help in this perplexity by suggesting for the title, "No Fool like an old Fool." The picture was finally sent to the exhibition under the name, "A Man teasing a Girl by putting on her Cap." Before the opening day the artist was startled by a communication from West urging him to withdraw the picture

*Academic
Advice*

“The Wardrobe Ransacked”

as being inferior to the rest of his paintings. The advice was acted upon in good faith. The proceeding, even had it been justified, must have been a grievous humiliation for a man of Wilkie's sensitive temperament.

But its justification is not admissible. The truth in this repellent episode would seem to be that a section of the Academy—West excluded—thought by handicapping Wilkie's reputation to advance that of Edward Bird, who had just begun to exhibit tasteful but uninspired bits of *genre*. The machinations of this majority were too powerful for West to restrain. A grievous wrong was done. The method adopted to enhance Bird's popularity entailed an experience too harsh for the man against whom he was pitted. Haydon tells how once, at this juncture, when he visited Wilkie, he found him prostrate on a couch—prayer-book in hand. (Surely not; Wilkie was a Scot, and would flee to his Bible and no prayer-book for consolation.) The satisfactory feature of the whole occurrence is the triumph of Wilkie's stability. He preserved a judicious calmness with reference to the official decision on his picture. He assured his own mind by accurate scrutiny that Bird's "Game of Put" and "The Choristers" were of no great quality; and he resolutely held on his way in his studio routine. "The Wardrobe Ransacked" found a purchaser in Lord de Dunstanville, who bought it at the price of £100.

Wilkie's health suffered from the severe struggle through which he now passed. He had a pulmonary

Sir David Wilkie

attack, and his strength was so enfeebled that he thought of wintering in Madeira. Dr. Baillie, however, restored his confidence by the intimation that a change to milder English air and complete rest would be sufficient. He stayed a month at Hampstead, where the Baillies placed their house at his disposal, and a second month was spent, on Sir George Beaumont's pressing invitation, at Dunmow. Beaumont, during Wilkie's illness, sent him a cheque for fifty guineas, which was declined, and he followed up this generosity with a gift of rich wine. How the patient's health flourished at Dunmow, and how he valiantly overcame his medical adviser's scruples as to continued work, are attested by the admirable portrait of "The Gamekeeper," which he then did. Quite recognising the necessity for genial air, Wilkie, on coming back to London, took temporary lodgings at 4 Manor Terrace, King's Road, Chelsea. Here for some months he quietly passed his time in retouching old pictures and in making small sketches. Certain of these sketches, drawn for Lord Mulgrave, were from his original pictures, as "The Blind Fiddler," "The Village Politicians," and "The Rent Day." The most important outcome of his stay at Chelsea was the completion of the long-delayed "Village Festival." It was bought by Mr. Angerstein for £800.

Before the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1811, Wilkie was elected to full membership in that institution. The vacancy was due to the death of Sir Francis Bourgeois. The announcement of Wilkie's election was made on

R.A.

the 12th of February 1811. His success, gained at an early age, and established over official prejudices, which it is certain militated against his advancement, did not affect his equanimity. *R.A.*

But it doubtless brought him inward content, and helped to brace his shaken frame to convalescence. In the Royal Academy Exhibition of this year he had only two pictures, a sketch entitled "A Humorous Scene," and his portrait of Sir George Beaumont's gamekeeper. The sketch was the basis of his "Penny Wedding." He now considered himself entitled to a spell of leisure; as on former red-letter days of his life, his thoughts turned to Cults, and in the autumn he was again at his father's manse.

His sojourn in his native place rapidly strengthened him. After a holiday of two months he was back in London vigorously planning and executing further tasks. His place of residence he changed from Great Portland Street to 29 Lower Phillimore Place, Kensington. Shortly after his return to London he took active steps to promote an exhibition of his pictures on his own account. This design *Wilkie's Exhibition* was very likely actuated by what he believed to be his unfair treatment by the members of the Royal Academy in the affair of "The Wardrobe Ransacked." He engaged a room at 87 Pall Mall, and there, in the spring of 1812, collected twenty-nine of his pictures. Included in the number were his Royal Academy paintings, "Pitlessie Fair," a sketch of his diploma picture, "The Rat Hunters," and the un-

Sir David Wilkie

finished drawing of "Blind Man's Buff." "Pitlessie Fair," called in the catalogue "The Country Fair," had some time previously been sent to its owner in Scotland, but he courteously forwarded it to the artist for the sake of this exhibition. The majority of the pieces were sketches of various pictures. Wilkie arranged that the superintendence of this exhibition should be entrusted to an old Edinburgh acquaintance, Thomas MacDonald, who had a printseller's business in London. MacDonald was paid a salary of four guineas a week. The venture was not a financial success, though it extended the fame of the artist. The exhibition had scarcely begun when an incident happened which threw upon it a sinister shadow. Some money was due by a former tenant to the proprietor of the house at 87 Pall Mall. This money, by a freak of the law, Wilkie was bound to pay. The debt amounted to £32. To meet this obligation the artist was forced to undergo the contumely of having his "Village Festival" impounded. That he was deeply touched by the incident is plain from the strong realism of the dramatic motive which signalised his "Distraining for Rent," a picture that owed its suggestion to this iniquitous raid.

Wilkie began work afresh with such zeal that his London friends were alarmed, and persuaded *Death of his Father* him to think of a prolonged holiday. This he by-and-by carried out. Meanwhile the death of his father caused a very marked change in his domestic relations. He consulted with his



"The Village Festival" (p. 55).

34

“Blind Man’s Buff”

mother and sister, and proposed that they should join him in London. Mrs. Wilkie hesitated, but arrangements were finally made to comply with this request, and in August 1813 Mrs. Wilkie and her daughter Helen left Cults for London and became inmates of Wilkie’s house in Lower Phillimore Place. The renewed familiar association brought him the utmost satisfaction. Cunningham says that Wilkie once remarked to him that “if he were desired to name the happiest hour of his life, it was when he saw his honoured mother and much-loved sister beside him while he was painting.” All the biographers acclaim the common-sense, vivacity, and personal charm of the artist’s mother. Helen Wilkie was her brother’s faithful adviser to the end of his career. She is said to have resembled her brother in personal appearance, though Haydon declared that, while the likeness was indisputable, she was “ten thousand times handsomer.” After Wilkie’s death, she married Dr. William Hunter, Surgeon-Major in the Coldstream Guards.

*Home in
London*

In the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1813 Wilkie had two pictures, “Blind Man’s Buff” and a portrait. The portrait was described as “from recollection of a young lady deceased.” “Blind Man’s Buff,” when no length of time on the painter’s easel, was much admired by the Prince Regent, who finally bought it for 500 guineas. The picture was very popular, and it became widely known through Raimbach’s excellent engraving. It is among the finest of Wilkie’s pictures, rich in colour,

*“Blind
Man’s
Buff”*

Sir David Wilkie

admirable in composition, and full of life and movement. "You can almost hear the laughter," is an appreciation of Silvestre, the French critic. The delineation of the light-hearted, boisterous game of British homes of the olden time is managed with an accuracy and a spirit that are alike perfect. The autumn of this year saw also the production of his fairly successful painting of "The Bagpiper." It was painted for Sir Francis Freeling. It was followed by "The Letter of Introduction" and "Duncan Gray." The former, a brilliant piece of satire, illustrates an incident in Wilkie's own experience. A month or two after his arrival

"The
Letter of
Intro-
duction"

in London he wrote home that he "could give no good account" of certain letters of recommendation carried with him over the Border. This picture is a pungent reminiscence of that hour of disillusion. The letters comprised a recommendation to Mr. Caleb Whitefoord, an antiquary and publicist of note. Whitefoord, who was of Scottish nationality, had an official position of influence. His chief distinction was his appointment as British intermediary when the American peace terms were discussed at Paris, Franklin being the American representative. Whitefoord published a book of essays, under the title of *Cross Readings*, which Johnson praised; while Goldsmith covered him with dubious glory as

"The best-humour'd man with the worst-humour'd muse."

At this personage Wilkie's humour is darted. The

“Duncan Gray”

picture most aptly corroborates the original story. It is said that when Wilkie presented his credentials to the diplomatist, his youthful look struck Whitefoord, who inquired his age. The painter's mannered and always irrepressible “Really!” uttered with much diffidence, aroused the suspicion of Whitefoord. He immediately regarded his visitor with that look of mistrust which is well reflected in the picture.

“Duncan Gray,” to begin with named “The Refusal,” is a nicely imagined and careful piece of work, noteworthy as containing portraits of three people belonging to the artist's own circle, those of Mrs. Wilkie and her daughter and *“Duncan Gray”* Mulready. It was bought by Dr. Baillie for 330 guineas. Dr. Baillie afterwards exchanged it for “The Pedlar,” also painted this year. “Duncan Gray” then passed into the possession of Lord Charles Townshend, who left it in the artist's hands. To this opportunity of retouching there may be traced its minute and beautiful finish. “The Letter of Introduction” was bought by Mr. Samuel Dobree, the price paid being 250 guineas. These two pictures were Wilkie's contribution to the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1814.

In May of this year, Wilkie, in company with Haydon, set out for Paris, on the first of those foreign visits which were ultimately to be of such momentous import in his career. These visits *À Paris!* brightly revealed the man's splendid individuality. In bodily weakness, as he was in every instance, he manifested two impressive traits of character—an all-

Sir David Wilkie

absorbing devotion to his life-work and an unquenchable fire of enthusiasm in seeking to accomplish its aims. As soon as he plants his feet on French soil he has something to say about the picturesqueness of the people. His *Journal* records how much he is charmed with the scenic colouring and the spell of the atmosphere amidst which his imagination moves. How keenly he was thus stirred is well observed in his words written at Rouen. "At the Cathedral," he says, "the immense building was almost entirely filled with people earnestly engaged in their devotions. Their dresses, in shape and colour, were varied beyond description, and, to our eyes, were so far removed from commonness and vulgarity, as to show a kind of delightful accordance with the building and the religion in which they were engaged." The travellers reached Paris on the 31st of May. Visits to the Louvre, then through Napoleon's spoliation full of the art treasures of Europe, led to the expression of criticism by Wilkie on the examples seen of the different schools of painting. He is inclined to depreciate the works of the French representatives, especially in point of colour; a Paul Veronese strikes him as admirable only in the excellences addressed to the eye; the bulk of his applause goes to Ostade, Terburg, and Rembrandt. On another day, at the Luxembourg, he is impressed with the Rubenses. He calls Rubens one of the foremost painters that ever existed, and, in fact, speaks of the great Flemish master in terms of admiration which he had as yet used of no other painter. During

Visit to Paris

these visits he sketched continually. Numerous calls added to the activity of his stay in Paris. He went to see David, Gérard, Brunet, and Bervie in their studios. Most enjoyable of all such visits was that to the house of the Prince de Bénévent, whose collection of Flemish pictures he thought "most beautiful." In common with the majority of artists, Wilkie liked the drama, and he now saw Talma play the part of Hamlet. From Paris he and Haydon went to Amiens, and thence returned to England, Wilkie asserting that whatever delight or satisfaction he had derived from his French journey had not made him the less esteem his own country. They reached home on the 5th of July.

Haydon gives a detailed account of this journey to Paris, but discusses it from a candidly satiric standpoint. The romantic beauty of Dieppe and Rouen delighted him as it did Wilkie; Paris, too, with the Louvre, the Jardin des Plantes, and kindred attractions, thoroughly won his admiration. But he misses no opportunity to record with amusing, yet sometimes rather pointless innuendo, the demeanour of his associate. One of the best passages of his narrative relates how each of them became absorbed in his own cult at the Louvre:—

"The next morning I was up early and went down to the Louvre, where I got all the particulars of admission from a National Guard. At the hour down we walked. I flew up three steps at a time, springing with fury at each remembrance of a fine picture.

Sir David Wilkie

When I got to the top, there was Wilkie, with the coolest deliberation, trotting up at his usual pace. I rated him for his want of feeling. I might just as well have scolded the Column. I soon left him at some Jan Steen; while I never stopped until I stood before the 'Transfiguration.' My first feeling was disappointment. It looked small, harsh, and hard."

Again, Haydon tells, with a good deal of humour, of the trouble that beset the two friends in carrying on a colloquy with a French doctor who had been summoned to prescribe for Wilkie in an attack of illness. He says, no doubt with truth, that the scene was worthy of Molière. Haydon spoke French better than he understood it; Wilkie did neither the one nor the other. The French doctor came to an intelligible discussion of the case with his clients only when he thundered out, perfectly irate, "Parlez-vous Latin?"

Wilkie returned to England to find that his fame was still on the increase, this advance being due to "The Letter of Introduction." He began work immediately on a large picture, "Distraining for Rent." This picture, if not on the high level of "The Rent Day," is little inferior to it. Like some of Wilkie's later paintings, it has a touch of staginess in its composition. But the dramatic conception is powerful and well-realised, and the drawing is beyond cavil. The scene has almost superabundant pathos. A bailiff and his clerk have invaded a debtor's house; the husband is seen over-

“Distraining for Rent”

whelmed with grief, the mother and children crushed with despair. The bailiff is a vigorously contrasted figure, his harshness being accentuated by the audacious display which marks his inhumanity. Mr. Dobree, the purchaser of “The Letter of Introduction,” wrote to Wilkie at this time, expressing a wish to have a second picture; but the artist replied that the only painting in hand did not meet the requirements mentioned. There were several applicants for the picture, which was bought by the directors of the British Institution. The British Institution, from its rivalry with the Royal Academy, perhaps made this bid for Wilkie’s painting because of his strained relations with that body. But, as C. R. Leslie narrates in his *Autobiographical Recollections*, the directors were soon to take alarm at their own boldness, and to doom the picture to an ignominious temporary withdrawal:—

“The great excellence of this picture had, at first, induced the Directors of the Institution to buy it as soon as it was seen at Somerset House. But they were afterwards frightened at what they had done, on its being suggested that the subject was a satire on landlords, and the picture was placed in a large, dark lumber-room under the gallery, where the students were allowed to wash their brushes. I saw it there, and told Young (the keeper) that if it remained long in so dark a place it would turn yellow. He accordingly allowed it to be hung in one of the upper rooms during the intervals between the exhibitions. Washington Irving saw it there. I was

Sir David Wilkie

present at the time, and I remember that he stood for some minutes before it without saying a word ; and when he turned round tears were streaming down his cheeks."

Wilkie painted but a second picture this year, the portrait of Miss H. Phipps, commissioned by her father, the Earl of Mulgrave. The following year was still less productive, a single painting having kept its place on his easel. This was the delightful "*Rabbit on the Wall*," painted for Mr. John Turner. It evinces some of the best qualities of Wilkie's craftsmanship, and in a letter to his sister he says "in many parts I have succeeded better than common in this painting." Its price was 200 guineas.

After another year at home Wilkie determined to roam amidst wholly fresh scenes. The two usual reasons impelled him. He desired to reinvigorate his health, which continued to cause him anxiety ; and he also aimed at extending his knowledge and deepening his appreciation of the Continental painters. He chose, in this instance, a holiday in the Netherlands. An interchange of courtesies with West, whose presidentship of the Royal Academy had now lasted for twenty-four years, formed an agreeable prelude to his journey. He was accompanied by Raimbach, the engraver. They set out in August 1816. Arrived in Holland, Wilkie perceived the imaginative reality of what he had long beheld in inner vision. In a letter to Sir George Beaumont



"Blind Man's Buff" (p. 65).

34

In Holland

he speaks with enthusiasm of the keenness of his impressions :—

“One of the first circumstances that struck me wherever I went was what you had prepared me for—the resemblance that everything wore to the Dutch and Flemish pictures. On leaving Ostend, not only the people, the houses and trees, but whole tracts of country, reminded me of Teniers; and, on getting farther into the country, this was only relieved by the pictures of Rubens, Wouvermans, and some other masters, taking his place. I thought I could trace the particular districts in Holland where Ostade, Jan Steen, Cuyp, and Rembrandt had studied, and could fancy the very spot where pictures of the masters had been painted. Indeed, nothing seemed new to me in the whole country; for I had been familiar with it all upon canvas; and, what one could not help wondering at was, that these old masters should have been able to draw the materials of so beautiful a variety of art from so contracted and monotonous a country.”

In this letter we have mention, for the first time, of the Duke of Wellington's commission for “The Chelsea Pensioners,” a piece of information which would appear to spring from a statement earlier in the epistle that he had visited the field of Waterloo, and been struck with the pictorial possibilities of the ruin of Hougomont. Wilkie remained altogether four months in the Netherlands, during which, to judge from his correspondence, he amply enjoyed the scenery of the country, and imbibed the fullest satisfaction

Sir David Wilkie

from the contemplation of the works of its celebrated painters.

By an entertaining freak of fortune, Wilkie, when returning to England, was, as Hogarth had been, arrested as a spy at Calais. Anxious to sketch Calais Gate, he secured the necessary consent from the authorities, of whose permission, however, their subordinates were evidently not made aware. The artist had painted for an hour when a gendarme came up and inquired what he was doing. Wilkie pointed to an officer on guard, and told the gendarme that he had obtained the officer's leave. The explanation was useless, and he was forced to go before the mayor. The magistrate was amenable to reason, and without delay freed the artist from arrest. His solution of the misunderstanding was assuring enough. He said that there were a number of people there, as in other French towns, who, if they saw a foreigner making a sketch of a fortified place, would naturally suppose it to be with a hostile intention, and finding it done openly, would be apt to blame the magistrates for allowing it. He considered it necessary, therefore, that Wilkie should not go on with his drawing, although from examining it, he was satisfied that the artist only did it for amusement.

Wilkie came home to England at the beginning of October. He now completed for the Marquis of Stafford a picture called "The Breakfast." The commission was of long-standing date, but had been unavoidably delayed. This purchase the artist reckoned a very

Tour in Scotland

great compliment, the Stafford Gallery enjoying the highest reputation among his contemporaries. "The Breakfast" ranks with the more creditable of Wilkie's minor pieces. Its price was £400. There were also painted this year "The Broken China Jar," "Sheepwashing," and "A Study of Bathsheba." With regard to "Sheepwashing," the artist wrote to Sir George Beaumont:—"It is, of course, being a landscape, entirely new to me. I certainly wish to get practice and to obtain some kind of proficiency in this way; but my ambition is not more than that of enabling myself to paint an out-door scene with facility, and in no respect whatever to depart from my own line." With the exception of "A Woody Landscape," painted in 1822, this was Wilkie's only contribution to landscape-painting proper.

A period of travel again diversified his professional engagements. This time he revisited Scotland. As in his tour in the Netherlands, he combined excursions throughout the country with appreciative visits to picture galleries, public and private, and to spots of historic interest. An especially delightful acquaintanceship was that which he renewed with Thomson of Duddingston. The artist-minister, however, could not undertake a proposed conjoint tour to the Highlands, being prevented by the approaching celebration of the Church Sacrament. An invitation to Wilkie from Mr. Kirkman Finlay, Lord Provost of Glasgow, asking him to come to the isle of Bute, where

Sir David Wilkie

he might behold "some of the primitive Highlanders," at first awakened no thrill of response, though he afterwards accepted it. His delighted fancy preferred to linger in this Scottish tour round the scenery and inhabitants of Edinburgh, a city that called up to him reminiscences of a tender and far-reaching kind. Cunningham believes that much of the environment which appears in late pictures by Wilkie, as "George IV. received by the People of Scotland" and "Mary, Queen of Scots, escaping from Lochleven Castle," may be traced to observations of this period. At Edinburgh he received a much-valued invitation from Scott to visit Abbotsford, the accomplishment of which is an episode of true historical significance. He prefaced his journey to Abbotsford by a run to Fife, where he called upon the Fergusons of Raith, and Lord and Lady Leven of Melville House. He reached Abbotsford in October, and was at once greatly struck with the beauty of the surroundings. Here he met the Ettrick Shepherd and Sir Adam Ferguson. He had a congenial interview with Hogg, a poet for whom it may be claimed that, like Burns and Wilkie, he interpreted with real and lasting charm the joys and sorrows of the common people of Scotland. The account of this meeting, recorded by Laidlaw, Scott's amanuensis, well bears recital. The scene was Hogg's farm at Altrive:—

"The kettle was hanging over a cheerful peat-fire, and soon began to simmer; and James, then a bachelor, despatched a shepherdess to borrow some loaf-bread,

Interview with Hogg

to which she added some kneaded cake. I felt pleased at the comfort the poet, as he was commonly called, had around him; and having several times accompanied Wilkie among the cottages of Gattonside and Darnick in search of the picturesque, I began to point out what might amuse him while Hogg busied himself preparing breakfast. The poet on this began to look and listen; I had not introduced Wilkie as an artist; and it is probable he had taken him, as he did a great poet, for a horse-couper: he, however, turned suddenly to me, exclaiming,

“‘Laidlaw! this is no’ the great Mr. Wilkie?’

“‘It’s just the great Mr. Wilkie, Hogg,’ I replied.

“‘Mr. Wilkie,’ exclaimed the shepherd, seizing him by the hand, ‘I cannot tell how proud I am to see you in my house, and how glad I am to see you are so young a man.’

“After breakfast we visited together the tower of Dryhope, had a beautiful view of St. Mary’s Loch and ‘those hills whence classic Yarrow flows,’ and returned to Abbotsford. When I told Scott of Hogg’s reception of Wilkie, ‘The fellow,’ said he; ‘it was the finest compliment ever paid to man.’”

The picture of “The Abbotsford Family,” which resulted from Wilkie’s stay with Scott, is little more than a curiosity in painting. This arises not from the painter’s deficiency but from the conception of the piece, a radical incongruity which was due to the wayward cheerfulness of Sir Adam Ferguson. The presentation of Scott as a miller, and the rest of the family

Sir David Wilkie

group in similar odd guises, appeals in the tamest degree to the fancy. Lockhart condemns the picture, alleging the total want of resemblance to the original persons, save in the case of the portrait of Sir Adam Ferguson. Carefully and pleasingly drawn, it fails only because of the unfitness of the subject.

A belated compliment reached Wilkie on his going back to London. The Town Council of Cupar had intended, during his stay in Scotland, to convey to him the freedom of the burgh ; but steps were taken too late to secure the personal attendance of the distinguished Scotsman whom they aspired to create their burgess. To meet this emergency, the freedom of the town was despatched after him to London. He accepted the mark of honour with excellent grace, taking the opportunity in his letter of thanks to inculcate upon public bodies the duty of encouraging art.

Asked by Mr. Dobree to contribute illustrations to a volume upon which he was engaged, Wilkie declined owing to pressure of engagements. He also pointed out that he doubted whether he should be able to do justice to the plan of these designs, which was of a historical kind. For, he urged, "a particular line of study is necessary to paint historical and biographical incidents." As a substitute he recommended Stothard, "whose reading and whose elegance and taste of design would fit him better than any artist I know for illustrating the incidents you may wish to record in the lives of the great characters gone

“The Penny Wedding”

by.” But later in the year he changed his mind about this proposal, and painted in response to Mr. Dobree’s request “The Death of Sir Philip Sidney.” It is an ineffective picture, hardly reaching the level of his “Alfred in the Neatherd’s Cottage.”

“The Abbotsford Family,” already mentioned, and “The Errand Boy” were hung in the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1818. His “Errand Boy,” a small and not important picture, was purchased by Sir John Swinburne. But to this short list of performances for the

year he added, besides a portrait of Raimbach, the brilliant and unrivalled “Penny Wedding.” “The Penny Wedding” has

“The
Penny
Wedding”

much skilfulness of composition, is excellent in drawing, and attests the artist’s genuine accomplishment in colour. It represents a species of merry-making that once held a recognised place in the customs of the Scottish working classes. To assist a couple in humble life to sustain the marriage festivity with appropriate gusto, those of their friends who attended the ceremony contributed a small sum, generally a shilling, to the expenditure of the supper. No Scottish wedding guest cares to dispense with a dance; and the guest of a “Penny Wedding” insisted upon it with a quite perfervid resolution. Wilkie’s painting is a realistic description of this part of the proceedings. His work, as previously stated, is a great advance upon “The Scotch Wedding” of David Allan. There is drollery and there is requisite faithfulness in Allan’s picture; but that of his potent successor breathes of very life.

Sir David Wilkie

Each individual, from the sprightly couples engaged in the Highland schottische to the graceful bride and bridegroom, the coquettish widow, and the crowing child, realises a fitting part in a vivid dramatic unity. "The Penny Wedding" was painted for the Prince Regent, "who," says Wilkie, "seemed perfectly satisfied with it." The price was 500 guineas.

The general repute of Wilkie was now beyond the common. To add to the brightness of his professional outlook, his health was fairly robust. No wonder then that his thoughts became engaged upon the development of new and greater tasks, and that his pencil never drew with more power and effect than it did at this time.



"The Letter of Introduction" (p.

8741

CHAPTER V.

MERIDIAN OF FAME.

The Iron Duke commissions "The Chelsea Pensioners"—"The China Menders"—"The Reading of a Will"—Professor Holmberg on "The Reading of a Will"—Maiden speech—Arduous labour at "The Chelsea Pensioners"—Love story—Minor pictures—"The School"—Over to France to recuperate—"The Chelsea Pensioners" in the Royal Academy Exhibition—Story regarding the payment of the picture—Wilkie's picture on George IV.'s visit to Edinburgh—William Collins—Sir Robert Peel—Limner to the King for Scotland—"The Parish Beadle"—Sketches from *The Gentle Shepherd*—"The Smugglers"—Illness of Mrs. Wilkie—Another trip to Scotland—Entertained by the artists of Edinburgh—Death of Mrs. Wilkie—Further domestic calamities—Breakdown—Resolves to visit Italy.

ONE of the most important occupations to which Wilkie ever turned is chronicled in his diary for January 1819. Having been absent from home, he had missed the Duke of Wellington, who did *The Iron Duke* him the honour to call. A number of appointments not always kept, and of interviews, some of them of short duration, which were held between the Duke of Wellington and Wilkie, culminated in the Duke's entrusting him with the painting of a picture. There were little points of difference in the

Sir David Wilkie

ideas of the Duke and those of the painter. In this only did they agree: that the picture should have reference to the Napoleonic war, and that it should deal with a gathering of soldiers. Wilkie prepared two sketches for the Duke's preliminary consideration. In the first the figures were mostly young men, in the second they were a band of pensioners. An agreement was come to that the conceptions of the two sketches should be blended. The Duke pointedly expressed his opinion regarding suggested characters. He approved of the introduction of a piper and of a man with a wooden leg; but he objected to the representation of a soldier afflicted with ophthalmia. On the conclusion of the interview in which the plan of "The Chelsea Pensioners" was arranged, Wilkie was told that he might now begin the picture immediately if he pleased.

Early in 1819 he completed two small pictures which he sent to the British Institution. "The China

One was Menders" was much the superior of the two,
Sold and soon obtained a purchaser in Mr. George
Phillips, at the price of 100 guineas. It is a very successful example of Wilkie's later *genre* work. The second of his British Institution pictures, a purely decorative work entitled "Nymphs Gathering Grapes," fared so ill in the eyes of connoisseurs that it was removed from the walls unbought. Towards the close of the year a worthy companion to "The China Menders" was produced in "The Whisky Still of Lochgilphead," noteworthy for the artist's extraordinary deftness in the management of a difficult interior.

“The Reading of a Will”

“The Reading of a Will” and “The Parish Beadle,” commissions agreed upon about this time, were hardly less remarkable in their issue than “The Chelsea Pensioners.” “The *Reading of a Will*” was painted for the King of Bavaria, who wished to lend variety to his collection with a picture from a representative British artist. The choice of Wilkie to carry out such a picture came through the Marquis of Stafford, to whom Lord Burghersh, on behalf of the King of Bavaria, wrote in explanation of the proposal. The subject was left to the discretion of Wilkie, who owed the hint for his “Reading of a Will” to Liston and Bannister the comedians. In his design, it is said, he had also before him the scene in *Guy Mannering* at the funeral of Lady Singleside. An incident of a somewhat sensational kind accompanied the production of this picture. In this matter George IV. was the leading actor. King George, who, as Scott believed, possessed a fund of genuine humour, had a sincere admiration for Wilkie’s genius. Presuming that the proposed “The Reading of a Will” would be of a humorous nature, he was very anxious to become its owner. He therefore endeavoured to stipulate that, if the picture did not fully correspond to the plan laid down in the original agreement, he might have an opportunity to become the purchaser. Here was a quandary. Wilkie, deeply perplexed, wrote to Sir Thomas Lawrence, through whom he had received the intimation of King George’s wishes. He stated very positively that

“*Under which King?*”

Sir David Wilkie

the arrangement with the King of Bavaria ought to take its course. Lawrence, in reply, tried to assure him that a direct communication from King George protected him from any accusation of disregard to the priority of agreement; but even the complimentary aphorism of Lawrence that "to have monarchs contending for your works is but a just tribute to their unequalled excellence," did not bring solace to the ruffled spirit of the painter. Further deliberation was cut short by a message from the King of Bavaria requesting that the picture might be forwarded to him. This demand was promptly complied with. The price paid was £425.

"The Reading of a Will" was exhibited in the Royal Academy of 1821. It was hailed with every token of approval by the public and critics alike. No contemporary painter had now anything like Wilkie's popularity. The place of "The Reading of a Will" is with the best of his larger pieces. The management of its colouring is done with rare skilfulness; while the composition is thoroughly just and effective. The scene portrayed is this. The husband in a well-to-do family had died, and the lawyer reads, in the midst of assembled relatives and friends, the last will and testament of the departed. Seated near this dignitary is the widow, depicted in an attitude of calmness, due in no small degree, we are led to infer, to the cheerful attentions of a new wooer, a military officer. A figure of much cleverness and precision is that of a lady who, to all appearance unmentioned in the document, or mentioned only to her

Letter from Professor Holmberg

annoyance, flounces out of the room. Another female figure, that of the child's nurse, is drawn with care and finish. As in all Wilkie's pictures, the accessories, which here are prominent, manifest apt and successful study. The head of a dog, which is dimly seen beneath the hangings of a chair, forms one of Wilkie's best representations of the "friend of man," in the limning of which he delighted and achieved distinction.

In a letter of date 27th September 1902, Professor Holmberg, the director of the State Picture Gallery at Munich, writes that, though this picture, like "The Blind Fiddler" and others of Wilkie's paintings, is rather seamed and fissured, it shows bravely amid its surroundings. "The colour," he says, "is fresh, clear, and well preserved. It is the finest picture of its time in our gallery, and we are proud to possess it."

The restless energy displayed by Wilkie in these years was not unobserved by Haydon. In the *Journals* which embody the continuation of his *Autobiography* he has a diverting reference to it. Tom Taylor thus epitomises an entry of Haydon's, made during January 1821:—

*His
Maiden
Speech*

"Wilkie writes more eagerly than usual 'that he has a great deal to tell him'; arrives, his look, his walk important, his form dilated; and sits down breathing with that consciousness of victory a man has after a successful argument. Drawing near the fire and chuckling with inward triumphs, out it comes at last. He has made his maiden speech at the

Sir David Wilkie

Academy, has carried his motion, has been praised, and begun to feel his weight. . . . The next time he dines with me I am perfectly convinced he will get up and say, 'Mr. President, I propose that the candle be snuffed!' He is now off for the next fortnight, and actually told me, when I asked how Lord Wellington's picture ('The Chelsea Pensioners') was getting on, that it was too cold to paint! What a character! Never was such simplicity, such genius, such prudence, such steadiness, and such inconsistency united."

To "The Chelsea Pensioners" Wilkie gave long and sedulous labour. In the autumn of 1821, as we learn from his *Journal*, he was still exercising minute pains upon it. No picture since "The Village Festival" had he worked at with assiduity so untiring. He says, for example, that he has been engaged for over a fortnight in making a great alteration in the figures; this consisted chiefly in transposing the figures on the left nearer to the centre, so that the man reading the paper should bulk more decidedly in a general view of the picture. Not only did the brushwork occupy him to an exacting degree; he did his utmost to acquire an accurate knowledge of the locality and of the houses on which he modelled the scene, as well as of the appearance of the people in the district. He was observed to measure the very ground that answered to the spot described. The jutting walls of the houses, the projecting signs, the quaint gateways that were features so distinctive of Old Chelsea, were

“The Chelsea Pensioners”

all diligently studied. The devastating wars of the French campaign had left their harsh traces on not a few of the martial figures that were familiar personages of Chelsea thoroughfares. Numbers of the women who lived around were soldiers' wives who had been through the Spanish battles, and had also witnessed Waterloo. Most of them “sat” for the picture. From beginning to end of his career, Wilkie held accuracy of design as of exceeding importance in his most deliberate work; at no time did he more consistently act upon this golden rule than when engaged upon the Duke's commission. Mrs. Thomson, the wife of Dr. Anthony Todd Thomson, a friend of Wilkie's, sets forth in her *Recollections* a graphic summary of the time, thought, and labour that the artist devoted to “The Chelsea Pensioners.” “I think,” she says, “he made ten sketches, at least, of the celebrated Waterloo picture; and we discussed them all. Fine as the picture became, it seemed, at first, not to be in his way; he was intensely anxious about it, thought of it incessantly, and dreamed of it, I believe; and slowly, inch by inch, matured the design in his careful mind.”

The same authority, by the way, is responsible for an account of the sole instance of a love affair in Wilkie's life which she interpolates at this time. But if the matter be treated seriously, *In Love* his was altogether the kind of passion that characterised the experiences of the sonneteer of chivalry. He worshipped his divinity from afar. Yet

Sir David Wilkie

such an ordeal has not uncommonly marked the histories of those with "imagination all compact"; and, though there is a suggestion of fantasy in Mrs. Thomson's narrative, her statement may have been woven with a strand of truth. What she says is this:—

"He worked slowly—so slow that he used to say he would never become through the rapidity of his work a rich man. I think he regretted this the more, as certainly he had at that time a decided partiality—to call it by no warmer name—for a young and beautiful friend of mine: her character was of the same quiet turn as his own. She never suspected his strong interest in her; and as at that time the difference in station was great, he thought it insurmountable. One evening, after dining with us, he accompanied us to a little dancing party, where he and I chose to look on. On a sudden, he said to me, as the young lady moved before us, 'I think her head and throat the most perfect I ever saw; they are matchless.' As we had not been speaking for some time, I said, 'You don't mean her: yet I guess whom you mean—why not try your fortune?' 'Oh!' he answered, 'she would never think of an artist. I would not—I would not presume.' I thought he was right, and made no reply."

Two or three minor works diversified the artist's toil on his large painting. These, if they did not increase, at all events maintained his repute in the line which he had made his own. Of these minor pictures, "The Newsmongers" and "Guess my Name" were hung in the Royal Academy

*Minor
Pictures*



UOM
" Duncan Gray " (p. 67).

Mr. U

“The Chelsea Pensioners”

Exhibition of 1821. A third, “The School,” he never completed. While cleverly designed and skilfully drawn and painted, “The Newsmongers” does not enshrine that dramatic interest so absolutely the note of Wilkie’s happiest efforts. In “Guess my Name” he had more success, the figure of the girl being very gracefully rendered. The merits of “The School,” both as to grouping and expression, are of no slight order. The conception of the picture carried the painter’s imagination back to Scotland and his native haunts. A church that appears in the landscape is believed to represent that of the Fifeshire village of Kingskettle; the children of the scene have all the features and dress of Scottish children; the aspect of the teacher, too, tells of his Scottish lineage. “The School” was commissioned by Mr. Watts Russell. When sold, in its unfinished condition, after Wilkie’s death, it brought £756.

Unswerving application vanquished Wilkie’s strength, and he was compelled to spend part of the autumn in France. In Paris he met Newton, the American artist, and the poet Moore. Here, too, he heard of Haydon’s marriage, the perfecting of that fervent passion, concerning which the impulsive Haydon says, “I hated my pictures; I hated the Elgin Marbles; I hated books.” The sea-breezes of Boulogne reinvigorated Wilkie, and he returned to London full of hope as to the continuation of his great picture. Early in 1822, the Duke of Wellington called at his studio, and expressed

*The Duke
calls*

Sir David Wilkie

his satisfaction with the progress shown in the picture, and with features of the painting. He referred, we are told in the *Journal*, to the drawing of the negro's head, and to the picture of the pet dog; he concluded with the criticism that he thought the piece the most finished that had yet passed through the painter's hands. The Duke came back at the end of a month, on this occasion observing to a friend who was with him that "The Rent Day" was the first of Wilkie's paintings that he had seen, and that "he was much struck with it."

"The Chelsea Pensioners" had the best position in the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1822. On its right was a portrait by Jackson of the Duke of York, and on its left a portrait of the Duke of Wellington by Sir Thomas Lawrence. So dense was the crowding round it that Raimbach, on the correct assumption that it would be liable to injury, suggested a railing. Wilkie thereupon wrote to the President of the Royal Academy, with a request that he should call a meeting to arrange for the protection of the picture. But before he received a reply to his letter he was convinced by a visit which he paid to the Academy that Raimbach's conjecture was warranted; accordingly, he wrote again to Sir Thomas Lawrence, asking as a favour that a railing might be put up without delay. The intrinsic charm of the subject attracted crowds. Similar precautions had to be exercised in later years with Mr. W. P. Frith's "Derby Day," though it did not

“The Chelsea Pensioners”

possess the historical glamour of “The Chelsea Pensioners.” Yet in some quarters jealous and even spiteful criticism rang keenly round Wilkie’s name, and only the strong verdict of educated opinion on his side gave this picture the applause which it received.

Cunningham, whose enthusiasm on behalf of Wilkie, though coloured by an intense admiration of the man, is always based on a trustworthy stratum of fact, describes the scene within the Academy walls as quite wonderful. In his generous words, the battle of Waterloo itself scarcely caused a greater stir in London than did “The Chelsea Pensioners.” All ranks made evident their cordial recognition of its merits. A crowd, shaped into a half-moon, stood before it from morning to night. Soldiers were the most eager of its admirers, not seldom accompanied by their wives and children. Veterans came on crutches. Those of the heads that were known to be portraits had an exceptional concern for the military section of the spectators. The heroes thus distinguished would be eagerly pointed out, and their names would be uttered, sometimes with a shout.

The excellences of “The Chelsea Pensioners” are by no means specious. The technique is the result of well-considered design and of able craftsmanship. Wilkie had more characters in this picture than he had introduced into any of his works since “Pitlessie Fair”; but they are arranged in a composition at once spirited and harmonious. The central group, in which a pensioner reads aloud to a brother pensioner and

Sir David Wilkie

to younger soldiers the news of the Waterloo victory, bears full evidence of accurate study, while its execution is developed with an expression alike firm and truthful. The subordinate figures are also conceived with insight and real vigour. The picture comes short of the greatest excellence through its general lightness of tone, which Dr. Waagen considers to be in some particulars even weak.

Sixty persons contribute each their part to this striking scene. Fifteen of these have prominence, while six are noteworthy beyond the rest. The chief figure, the reading pensioner of the central group, is the portrait of a veteran who fought with Wolfe; the sergeant of the Oxford Blues fought at Vittoria, and the black dog at his feet is the veritable semblance of "The Old Duke," which accompanied this soldier's regiment all over Spain. The portrait of a second veteran is that of a warrior who gained his laurels at Assaye. The negro was a servant of Marshal Moreau's. Others of the personages in the Waterloo picture, if not individual portraits, were somehow associated with the famous victory. A Lifeguardsman calls to mind the glory of a regiment that, along with the Scots Greys and Inniskilling Dragoons, repelled the desperate charges of the French cuirassiers. Nor did the painter omit to dedicate his genius to the praise of the "brave Forty-Second," which suffered so heavily on the fateful day whose story he handled. The sad anxiety of the woman who scans the list of dead and wounded has often been alluded to as one of Wilkie's most pathetic delineations.

George IV. at Holyrood

For this picture the artist asked and was paid 1200 guineas. A tradition says that this sum was paid by the purchaser in bank-notes, and that when Wilkie spoke of the greater convenience of a cheque, the Duke replied that he did not wish his bankers to be aware that he was so egregiously foolish as to spend so much money on a picture. Raimbach repeats this story, but, as Mr. J. A. Manson argues, in his *Life of Sir Edwin Landseer*, it "is incredible."

To the third great picture of the "'twenties" Wilkie now directed his undivided attention. Yet he was not for long to be permitted to do so, nor indeed to devote himself to the activities of his studio. George IV. was about to visit *A Coming Event* Edinburgh, and this event attracted Wilkie as having in it the probability of an appropriate occupation for his pencil. Immediately on the royal tour being announced, he resolved to proceed to Scotland. He gave every incident connected with the visit, together with the localities of Edinburgh, well-weighed consideration. He debated four different points of view from which he ought to develop a picture: whether he should draw a picture of the king's arrival, or of his visit to the palace of Holyrood, to the castle, or to the church. He decided upon the scene at Holyrood.

The citizens of Edinburgh, who, little more than sixty years before, had been intensely Jacobite, had not yet shaken off a sentimental attachment to the Stuart cause. Yet on the occasion of this progress to George IV. they did not fail to extend to him an eager loyalty, at once

Sir David Wilkie

hearty and wide-reaching. This they adroitly tempered by a general adoption of the tartan dress. The king was captivated by this fashion, and though *George IV. on his landing in Scotland* he wore a field-marshal's uniform, he later exchanged it for the typical garb of the Scottish Celt. His yacht, the *Royal George*, was convoyed by men-of-war and yachts of the Admiralty. A pleasing ceremony was carried through in Leith Roads, when Scott went on board the royal yacht bearing the gift of a silver star from the ladies of Edinburgh. When Scott's presence was announced to the King, he exclaimed, "What! Sir Walter Scott! the man in Scotland I most wish to see! Let him come up immediately." Scott is described by a local historian as having been introduced to the King, and then, kneeling, to have delivered his gift to his sovereign. His Majesty received it graciously, and wore it next day on landing. Sir Walter remained in conversation with the King for upwards of an hour.

Scott, in his poetical capacity, prepared a written welcome to the king, which was widely circulated. Its heartiness and its length are equally emphatic. The chorus was :—

"Carle, now the King's come !
Carle, now the King's come !
Thou shalt dance, and I will sing,
Carle, now the King's come !"

The official gatherings to pay homage to King George were not few, and were numerously attended. The

Wilkie and Collins

people of Scotland viewed with enthusiasm his presence in their midst, and did their part to the utmost to shape the event on an impressive scale. The visit was thus altogether worthy of a great historical picture, and Wilkie was aware of the standard which he was expected to keep in mind. Nor in the sequel did he show any deficiency in realising the scope of his intention. If there are flaws in his picture of "George IV. received by the People of Scotland," it is nevertheless of lofty conception and powerful in treatment. It deserves to be recalled that Turner was also now in Edinburgh with the purpose of drawing a picture to celebrate the King's stay in the Scottish metropolis ; but his aim, unhappily, was never fulfilled.

*Wilkie's
Picture*

Two of Wilkie's intimate friends, William Collins and Andrew Geddes, were visiting Edinburgh on this occasion. Collins, like Turner, contemplated, but with an equally negative result, the painting of a commemorative picture. Collins was the esteemed friend of Wilkie's later years, as Haydon was the friend of his youth. He had acquired fame by his paintings, and was a Royal Academician. His excellent landscape and figure pieces, while not work of the strongest kind, have veracity and distinction. His sense of humour was keen, and his Edinburgh correspondence contains graphic accounts of pleasant social meetings, in which Scott, Sir Adam Ferguson, and other notabilities shone brightly. He and Wilkie made a short excursion from Edinburgh to Kinross-shire, where together they produced a

Sir David Wilkie

sketch, the one doing the landscape, the other the figures.

When Wilkie left for London he was strangely ignorant of an important step in the career of his friend, his marriage to Miss Geddes. This lady (no relation, it may be mentioned, of Geddes, the painter) *Collins's* Collins had met some years before in London, *Wedding* at the house of her sister, Mrs. Carpenter, a portrait-painter. The betrothal had been quietly arranged in 1821. When the lover made his professional journey to Edinburgh, his betrothed also travelled north, going, however, by sea. No inkling of all these movements became known to Wilkie, the reticence of Collins being inexplicable; he learned of Collins's change of domestic position only by a dramatic introduction to that gentleman's wife. Odd as were the arrangements for this marriage, the performance of the ceremony partook no less of a similar quality. It was conducted by the Rev. Archibald Alison, author of the *Essay on Taste*, who was Incumbent of St. Paul's Chapel in Edinburgh and father of the voluminous historian. On the conclusion of the ceremony, he is said to have made this speech when declining the offer of a fee:—"You bear the name of a great poet, and you are yourself increasing the honours of that name, by your progress in one of the intellectual arts—I could receive no fees from *any* 'William Collins'; and still less could I take them from you."

While at Edinburgh, Wilkie made the acquaintance of Sir Robert Peel, who wished to bespeak any picture



"The Rabbit on the Wall" (p. 72).

1700

Limner to the King

that he might paint relating to the King's visit to the city. Peel was a competent judge on matters of art, and it was no trifling compliment to an artist to have a work included in his collection. He was not, however, satisfied with the sketches shown him relating to the visit to Edinburgh. He proposed instead a subject allied to that of "The Parish Beadle." A sketch dealing with John Knox's preaching attracted him, and this ultimately was to be the painting of his choice. Peel's personal regard for Wilkie and his admiration of his genius were to be the origin of a fresh honour paid to the artist. Wilkie was appointed to the post of Limner to the King for Scotland, the vacancy being caused by the death of Sir Henry Raeburn. A hitherto unpublished letter, preserved in the Edinburgh University Library, displays his unabating concern as to the fitting discharge of his duties:—"In sending your way to-morrow I cannot refrain from writing to give you a piece of news which was conveyed to me last week by a letter from the Secretary of State. It stated that the appointment of Limner to the King for Scotland, become vacant by the death of Sir Henry Raeburn, his Majesty had been most graciously pleased to confer upon me. This is probably an ancient office, and may have been held by those limners who painted the many portraits of kings and queens in the old gallery of Holyrood House. In later times, however, it has become quite a sinecure, and was held for twenty

Sir David Wilkie

years by one not an artist, and was only retrieved from this misapplication by coming very lately into the hands of Sir Henry Raeburn. In descending to me, though professionally in the right channel, I feel that it would be discreet to do something in virtue of this office, and though a placeman and a pensioner and a non-resident, I still am ambitious to make my art subservient to such an object as that of illustrating the connection that subsists between his Majesty and his ancient kingdom, that I may not be accounted altogether a sinecurist."

For the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1823, Wilkie had ready a picture in his best style—"The Parish Beadle"—and two portraits, that of the Duke of York, and a drawing in chalk of Mr. George Young. "*The Parish Beadle*" deals with a village constable of a vanished type and his capture of a group of foreign vagrants, who are possessed of two performing animals—a dog and a monkey. The picture is not dramatically strong, if the drawing of the woman be excepted; but it is of moment in its technical aspect, indicating as it does the earliest instance in Wilkie's art of the influence of Rembrandt. Mr. Ridley Colborne bought it at the price of 350 guineas.

By the summer of 1823, the picture on the king's visit to Edinburgh was fairly begun. As a variation from the severe tax of this painting, Wilkie betook himself, as he usually did in such circumstances, to the simultaneous treatment of lighter themes. These

Entertained in Edinburgh

he at present found in drawings from *The Gentle Shepherd*. A scene from *The Gentle Shepherd* was painted for Sir Robert Liston, while "The Cottage Toilet," also based upon a passage in Ramsay's pastoral, was bought by the Duke of Bedford. These sketches were pleasingly, if rather formally treated. The mere intervention of the medium of books, as a rule, detracted from the verisimilitude of Wilkie's portrayal. Artificiality enters into the management of all his pictures which did not derive their hues from real life. Another minor work of this time was "The Smugglers," painted for Sir Robert Peel. This is marked by much skill of draughtsmanship and by power of expression, and holds a place with the best of the artist's paintings of a less ambitious sort.

The year 1824 opened gloomily for Wilkie. A serious attack of illness with which his mother was seized caused alarm. Indications of her convalescence enabled her son to travel to Scotland to make additions to his conception of his absorbing picture. He reached Edinburgh in September. On the 10th of this month the artists of Edinburgh entertained him to a public dinner. Alexander Nasmyth was chairman, and William Allan and Landseer were present. From Edinburgh Wilkie crossed to Fife, where at Cambo House he had sittings from Lord Kellie for his portrait. At Cupar he met Mr. Gillespie, his father's successor, and other old friends, whose guest he was at a

*Another
Trip to
Scotland*

Sir David Wilkie

Presbytery dinner. Public bodies in Scotland, in truth, vied with one another in their zeal to be hospitable. The Provost and Town Council of Cupar followed the Presbytery's example. At this festivity he spoke at considerable length; his speech was full of acute and wise opinion. He intended to go to Abbotsford with the view of painting a portrait of Scott; but the renewed illness of his mother interfered with his plan, and he returned hurriedly to London. His mother died *Calamities* the day before he reached home. Calamities thickened upon him. The closing months of 1824 witnessed the deaths of his two elder brothers, James and John, the death of his sister's betrothed, and the severe commercial embarrassment of his younger brother, Thomas. To swell the list of his troubles, his nervous system, compelled to grapple with such an overwhelming force of catastrophes, yielded to the attack. He was seized with symptoms of paralysis, and these disappeared only to leave a latent *Break-down* and inscrutable nervous disease in their stead. He passed some months of painful suspense before he determined to act upon the advice of his physicians and to seek for renewed vigour under milder skies than those of England. His purpose was to go to France, but predisposition gradually led him to Italy. The tour indeed was to be greatly prolonged, and to have remarkable consequences on his art. The completion of a rather infelicitous *genre* picture, "The Highland Family," occupied him before he began his journey.

CHAPTER VI.

ITALY.

Wilkie sets out for Italy—Paris doctor consulted—Journey through Switzerland—Milan—Change of style—Goethe on art—Pisa—Florence—Rome—Criticism of Michael Angelo—Holy Week at Rome—Financial troubles—Bologna—Parma—Venice—Titian and Tintoretto—Correspondence with Peel and Beaumont—Raimbach's *Memoirs*—Visit to Germany—Innsbruck—Munich—"The Reading of a Will"—Dresden—The baths at Töplitz—Vienna—Return to Italy—Entertained by Scottish artists at Rome—Death of Beaumont—George IV.'s generosity—Revived strength—Italian pictures—Geneva—Arrival in Spain.

TOWARDS the end of July 1825 Wilkie set out on his foreign tour. His travelling companions were David Lister, his cousin, and Newton, the American artist. Bennet, the doctor whom he consulted at Paris, was opposed to his travelling, and insisted that bleeding would be the proper *Declines* corrective for his malady. The patient's *to be Bled* own opinion persuaded him to abjure doctors and try the mountain air of Switzerland, and thereafter the genial climate of Italy. That the mere relief from work hastened a measure of renewed strength in him is apparent from his being well enough to meet Talma,

Sir David Wilkie

and hold pleasant converse with him. Convinced of the probable benefits of travel, he resolved to proceed on his way. That he was far from well may be inferred from the fact that his friend, Mr. Dawson Turner, for a time declined the responsibility of accompanying him. Still he never hesitated. "After having consultations with doctors and no doctors," as he says, he prepared for his journey, his ultimate destination being Rome.

The route was through Switzerland. Here the painter enjoyed the magnificence of the scenery. At Geneva he was enraptured with the mountains and the sunlight effects upon them. "*Switzerland* we moved on," he writes, "we looked earnestly to distinguish Mont Blanc, and, to our surprise, as our eye got to that part of the range, we found its white top soaring majestically above the strata into which the highest part only of the others had been able to immerse their heads." Wilkie stayed in Switzerland about a fortnight. The restorative power of his surroundings exercised its happy influence, and his illness perceptibly lightened.

He left Switzerland to take up his residence at Milan. His letters tell plainly of the rare pleasure he experienced from his introduction to Italy. They include ample evidence of his all-engaging delight in the storied enchantment of the land and its splendid treasures of art. Though he was to struggle with no great success against ill health during a prolonged stay in Italy, the entrancing zeal of the student that fitly possessed him on his coming into the country, did much to soothe

Change of Style

if not to dispel his physical weakness. Face to face with a brilliant example of Titian, or with the triumphs of Michael Angelo, his harassing and unconquerable enemy was forgotten.

With the study of Italian art commenced Wilkie's absolute change of style which has led to protracted and eager debate. The majority of the critics have decided against him, and their attitude is so far justified. There can be no question that his real province was that of the *genre* painter. But there is surely a defence for the change of style which he now adopted. It is certain that not only was his supreme gift that of the *genre* painter, but that he learned comparatively little, if at the outset he learned anything at all, from his acquaintance with the Dutch masters. *Genre* painting was his proper domain as a purely creative artist. But partly from his circumstances, partly from inclination, when his mind traversed with intimate survey the glorious storehouses of Italian and Spanish painting, he contrived and finally practised with definite purpose a scheme of art neither familiar nor suitable to him, but yet offering him scope for displaying the versatility of his genius. To admit this is to place Wilkie within the category of imitators. But why should there be no vindication of the imitator in painting? The right of the imitator in poetry is freely conceded. It can hardly be otherwise in painting, for the interplay of principle throughout the fine arts is inherent in them. Wilkie from the date of his

Sir David Wilkie

arrival on Italian ground to the conclusion of his study of the pictures at Madrid, began the career of a student-painter, of an artist who has acquired an insight and a method that essentially pertain to the region of culture. To deny his right to pursue this course is to deny also the poetical quality of such highly valued poetical imitations as Schiller's *Bride of Messina* or Arnold's *Merope*. Both these works belong to a species of composition that was not within the poet's natural capacity. Yet these imitations, though not wholly satisfying, are each a striking poetical effort. How far Wilkie succeeded as a historical painter, broadly inspired by his knowledge of the Italian and Spanish masters, need not be discussed at the present stage. Let it be here sufficient to mention that the majority of his historical paintings were not avowedly produced as the output of the intrinsic genius of the man, but rather as experiments in art.

That a painter has a claim to be imitative, it may be remarked, is recognised by Goethe, whose critical judgment on æsthetics is beyond dispute. A painter of ability himself, he more than once enunciated the justice of observing nature through the perception of another artist. He says, for example:—"I fancied I saw before me a picture by Ostade, so perfect that one could hang it up only in the gallery. The position of the objects, the light, the shadow, the brownish tint of the whole, the magical harmony, everything that one admires in those pictures, I here saw in reality. It was the first time that I perceived in so high a degree



"The Penny Wedding" (p. 79).

U. S. N.

34

Nature in Art

the faculty which I afterwards exercised with more consciousness, namely, that of seeing nature with the eyes of this or that artist, to whose works I had devoted a particular attention. This faculty has afforded me much enjoyment, but has also increased the desire zealously to abandon myself, from time to time, to the exercise of a talent which nature seemed to have denied me." He further asserts:—"My eye, sharpened by nature, again turned to the contemplation of art, for which the beautiful Frankfort collections afforded me the best opportunity, both in paintings and engravings. . . . To see nature in art became with me a passion, which, in its highest moments, must have appeared to others, passionate amateurs as they might be, almost like madness; and how could such an inclination be better fostered than by a constant observation of the excellent works of the Netherlanders?"

Having reached Milan, Wilkie made a complete round of the Italian picture galleries. Among the many pictures which he saw at Milan, he was attracted only by "The Last Supper" *Milan* of Da Vinci. His critical appreciation of the other masters in the Milan collection brought home to him the conviction that the later Italian masters owed a good deal to the early painters, not so much by example as by prepara- *Pisa* tion of the ground which was afterwards to yield the perfect bloom of native art. At Pisa, his next halting-place, he saw a number of original

Sir David Wilkie

drawings by Giotto, which struck him with their primitive rudeness of style. He had nought but praise for a St. Catherine by Andrea del Sarto. The collection of the Florence galleries gave him the deepest satisfaction. The gems of *Florence* painting and sculpture, as seen in the productions of Michael Angelo, Titian, and Cimabue, called forth his eager commendation. His researches were ably seconded by two congenial spirits whom he met in Florence—the artists Phillips and Hilton. They generally accompanied him when he viewed the picture galleries; they discussed with him the merits of each picture, and strove along with him to make a selection of paintings for their particular study. Their enthusiasm carried them into the churches at all hours, “during masses, and vespers, and among priests and monks.”

The three friends went together to Rome. Here Wilkie looked for the culmination of his hopes in his study of the works of the Italian *Rome* masters. He reached the city, however, during evil days in its history. Italy at the time of his journey was torn with the social strifes that preceded the ameliorating sway of Garibaldi, and the condition of the masses was of a lamentable kind. Secret societies abounded, and he has a fierce story to tell of an outbreak of the Carbonari. His correspondence is full of the disillusionment he felt regarding Rome and its inhabitants. The surrounding country he deemed a district sufficiently dreary, volcanic and

Michael Angelo

unwholesome ; the poverty of the people filled him with dismay. Phillips and Hilton shared his impressions. "All agree with me," he writes to his sister, "that this is a horrible country; and as for cheapness, which they all urge, I say that if, in England, you are satisfied with the same accommodation, you can live as cheap at home as here. Rooms with coarse brick floors, shattered windows, gain nothing by arabesque and fresco ceilings; and if this were on the confines of Norway or Siberia, allowance might be made for it; but in boasted Italy, the ancient mistress of arts, it shows only the degeneracy of her present people."

Happily, he had other subjects to engage his notice, and visits to the Vatican and the Sistine Chapel invariably cut short such untoward musings. So keen was the spirit with which he and his companions approached the consideration of the pre-eminent masters that, he says, Phillips, Hilton, and himself, holding one another's shoulders, spent an hour's contemplation upon a scaffolding half-way up to Michael Angelo's "Last Judgment." His account of this painter, which is set down at length, well illustrates the thoroughness and force of his critical judgment:—"As an instance of Michael Angelo's power, the combination of mind and science seemed here greater than anything I had ever witnessed. Comparing it, on the other hand, with preconceived notions, the technical execution was far beyond my expectations. It is painted with more body and finish, and perhaps even with more delicacy

*Michael
Angelo*

Sir David Wilkie

than the *stanse* of Raphael, and with more dexterity than any other artist that ever lived. As to colour, I will maintain, though subordinate to higher excellencies, it is still of first-rate quality, remote from all that is gaudy, flimsy, white, or meretricious ; lurid and terrific if you will, but never disagreeable ; in parts of the ceiling where it is wanted, often approaching the beautiful as well as the sublime. While animated with these impressions, and while we could not but acknowledge defects in the arrangement of the whole, and even of the drawing of individual parts, we allowed it was done with great finish, delicacy, and feeling,—qualities which all copies of him have failed in giving ; and when doubts arose in our minds as to colour, we still, in adverting to the parts the best preserved, acknowledged that Titian himself had never surpassed them.”

Holy Week occurred during Wilkie's stay in Rome, and he saw with piquant curiosity bands of pilgrims assembling in the city, each party attended
Holy by its *pifferaro*, or piper, the music of whose
Week instrument sounded to him like that of the Highland bagpipe. He also gained admittance to the sacred ceremony at the convent of Santa Trinita, where a multitude numbering between 2000 and 3000 went through the rite of feet-washing, and afterwards dined in a vast company. Of both these events he was later to paint pictures. A fashionable masquerade introduced him as an active participator. He donned a Vandyck dress for the celebration, and looked, as we

Financial Troubles

learn from the description of a spectator, like a portrait figure that had just stepped out of its frame. With the addition of a delighted survey of the sculptures of the Vatican, he completed a knowledge of the principal attractions that Rome held out to him.

Before he left the city he heard evil news of his affairs at home. The London firm of Hurst & Robinson, printsellers, in whose business he had a large share, became bankrupt, and engravings of his which were being prepared for them were necessarily delayed. Amidst all his financial troubles, he yet felt that he was less of a victim than Scott, who, during the same crisis that threatened Wilkie's solvency, lost so heavily through the failure of Constable, the publisher. These two distinguished Scotsmen had now kept in touch for some years, and Scott's courageous comment on his own situation perhaps aided in steadying his friend's resolution. The author of *Waverley* maintained, at that dark hour of his life, that while he had his dog, his gun, and his books, few of his comforts could be diminished, and that he was now annoyed only by the sympathies of his friends.

From Rome Wilkie travelled to Bologna, of whose school of painters he did not think highly. After a careful study of their works, he viewed more optimistically the works of West and other British painters. To the eye of the artist, he declared the Bolognese Gallery was such as other countries might equal and even surpass. He experienced greater satisfaction at Parma. "For the

Sir David Wilkie

artist," he writes in his *Journal*, "this is *the* place." On one of the days of his sojourn in this city, he passed the morning in a pigeon-hole on *Parma* the cupola of Correggio. A garland of angel figures round the top of the dome he described as luxurious and brilliant even amidst the decay of the material, while he was finally convinced that this was the most original of all the works he had seen of Correggio.

The last of his halting-places was Venice. Exceedingly anxious to investigate the style of Titian's colouring, at Venice he had full opportunity to do *Venice* so. Colour was never Wilkie's strongest point, and he probably hoped to gain important insight from the examination he intended to carry out on the works of Titian, Tintoretto, and the leaders of the Venetian school. The wonderful ingredients from which the old Italian painters prepared their colours he did not seek to analyse; but he believed that he might by minute observation arrive at a safe conclusion as to their mode of handling their colours. Titian was to him the master of colourists. Tintoretto, though he reckoned him an inferior genius to Titian, he yet regarded as an artist thoroughly accomplished as far as the extrinsic management of his materials was concerned. An early subject of his attention was the "St. Pietro Martire" of Titian. He admired its grandeur, its poetical feeling, and its deep-toned colour. The whole impression produced he said was one of "awe and terror." His

The Venetian Masters

estimate of the work of Tintoretto, when he compared it with that of Titian, considerably declined. His colour he thought conventional and mechanical, while it seemed to him to be greatly lacking in expression and sentiment. He missed most of all "the high aim, the something unattainable, and the profound feeling for the indescribable thoughts of man." To Titian he reverted again and again. The "St. Pietro Martire" he studied now under the effects of a bright sun, then again at twilight. New beauties were discovered at each examination. Midday contemplation revealed the fact that the trees were very clear and most beautifully and adroitly painted. The evening light he thought brought out conspicuously the figures of the two angels.

All the time and thought at Wilkie's disposal was not permitted to be devoted to the picture galleries. He was in continual correspondence with his friends in England. Little brightness yet characterised his financial outlook. From Venice he sent a large payment to Hurst & Robinson, "the amount," he says, "of my very heavy and hard-earned claims upon their house." A dispute with Edward Smith, the engraver, with reference to the reproduction of a picture caused him much annoyance, and he bitterly ascribed it to personal hostility. To judge from this extract from a letter to his brother Thomas, these mundane distractions sadly unsettled the finer thoughts within him:—"General Phipps has written to me with many expressions of kindness and goodwill, requesting me not to make myself uneasy about the affair with the Ordnance. This is, however,

Sir David Wilkie

a thing I still have to meet, after all the difficulties I have gone through ; and when I see the Rialto, and the Doge's Palace, I am more apt to picture to myself the lively scenes that Shakespeare has drawn of Antonio, with the pound of flesh and the forfeited bond, than to think of what these should alone suggest—the pictures of Canaletti and Titian."

Such gloomy events were to some extent counter-balanced by pleasant letters of encouragement and friendly advice from Peel and Sir George Beaumont. Mr. Woodburn, the art connoisseur, whom he met at Venice, and who was ever afterwards to be a cherished friend, exerted himself to the utmost to cheer and help the artist. His unfailing interest, indeed, did a great deal to enliven what would otherwise have been solitary and anxious hours for Wilkie in Venice. The sufferer's health was yet far from satisfactory. With seasons of mitigation, the disease remained very much where it was. The resolve was made towards the end of May 1826 that Wilkie should pass some months in Germany. The initiative towards taking this step was due to Sir George Beaumont. He had now spent eight months in Italy, having, as he said, seen a world of objects for amusement and for study : "everything," so run his pathetic words, "that, under happier circumstances, would have delighted and improved, but for one object of my journey have been quite unavailing—that of the recovery of health."

Raimbach's son, in his *Memoirs* of his father, throws



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"The China Menders" (1865)

Ardu

The Fatherland

light upon the worn condition of Wilkie during his Italian sojourn. Uwins, the painter, then an art-student at Naples, shows in a letter to Raimbach how enfeebled Wilkie really was. He says that Wilkie visited him in his studio, and gratified him with his generous friendliness. The great painter freely criticised his pictures, suggested improvements, and even worked on one of them. For a time the master's hand moved steadily and quickly at its accustomed occupation ; but this was only for a little. A few minutes sufficed. The worker abruptly threw down the palette and brushes, and requested his host to continue the unfinished effort. The requisite exertion for painting was yet too much for him.

Innsbruck was the first town in German territory at which Wilkie and his party stopped on their way north. He expressed his delight with the country and the people. Amusement was supplied *Innsbruck* by the travellers' ingenuity in endeavouring to make themselves understood. A German dictionary, Mr. Woodburn's knowledge of Dutch, and the painter's own Scottish dialect united to bear them successfully onwards. At Munich it was a regret to learn of the death of the King of Bavaria. Of "The *Munich* Reading of a Will" flattering accounts were everywhere heard. The young king was said to hold a high opinion concerning it. It was further stated that a frame, designed by the late king, had taken the place of the original frame, and that the picture was hung most favourably on the walls of the royal palace. A few

Sir David Wilkie

days after Wilkie's arrival at Munich, he was admitted to the royal apartments that he might cast eyes upon his workmanship. His narrative of this occurrence throws a pleasing side-light on his estimate of this work, an exceptionally charitable estimate on the part of a man who generally was a rigid critic of his own performances:—"In the room where the jewels, swords, and other articles of value were placed, and where were also the most choice of the works he has acquired, and in a choice situation, was placed *my picture*, the whole scene and story of which was remarkably in accordance with that which we were now witnessing. Its look and hue gratified me extremely. It is surrounded by a Teniers, a Wouvermans, a Ruysdael, and various other good specimens of the Dutch masters; is remarkably in harmony with them, looks rich and powerful, stands its ground well, and, if sold with them, looks as if it would bear as good a price. I feared it might look dry and poor and white; but quite the contrary; I have not seen any of my pictures look better in their place. They told me here I would be satisfied with it, and I really am so. The frame I sent with it was thought too large and heavy. The king had the present one made, very handsome and delicate; and the other now hangs in the Public Gallery, with a fine portrait by Rubens in it." From Munich the travellers proceeded to Bayreuth, and thence to Dresden. The Dresden gallery, with its vast collection of art treasures gathered from far, was the goal of Wilkie's

The Dresden Gallery

tour in Germany. He thought the gallery ill arranged, but the pictures were all that he anticipated. The Correggios attracted him most. On Correggio's "Notte" he bestowed many hours of study. Yet this famous picture of the great Venetian did not altogether content Wilkie. Its execution disappointed him. It failed, he imagined, to convey adequately the appearance of night. He accounted for certain defects from the possibility of its having undergone repairs. On the main qualities of the picture, its conception, purpose, and originality, its success as an arrangement of colours, of effect, and of sentiment, he proposed no critical limitations, and he pronounced it, all in all, "one of the first works the art of painting has to boast of, and in the adaptation of light and shadow to the illusion of the subject, one of the triumphs of modern art." Another interesting feature of his study at the Dresden gallery was the defence elicited from him of the pictures of Watteau. He considered the examples of that painter's which he saw there as elegant and gay in the extreme. His criticism of Watteau, indeed, approves his sound and excellent judgment of the requisites of painting. His defence of Watteau, contained in his *Journal*, may be cited as a model piece of acute appreciation, expressed with choiceness and precision of phraseology.

His social life in Dresden passed very pleasantly. His nephew Lister left him at Dresden; but there were many English residents whose friendship he could cultivate. The most prominent of these English friends

Sir David Wilkie

was Mr. Chad, the British minister, who prevailed upon him to consult the able German physician Dr. Kreisig. Compliance with this advice produced the suggestion that Wilkie should try the baths at Töplitz for a month. He agreed to do so with reluctance, having hitherto had no great reason to trust to medical theories. He wrote to his brother that notwithstanding physical weakness he enjoyed his German experiences. As one of the amenities of his situation he chronicles his growing accomplishment in the French language. The concert-room and the theatre aided to lighten his moments of leisure. He was charmed with an exhibition of a quaint tableau at a small theatre. This he described with some fulness in a letter to his brother. The curtain was drawn up between the acts of a play, and the stage darkened. At the back was represented a scene resembling a picture-frame. Men and women, wearing appropriate garb, occupied the interior of this frame, and made up the composition of some known picture,—curiously anticipating the *tableaux vivants* of the later Victorian age. The tableau of this kind that was performed when Wilkie was present was, to his unfeigned delight, an interior after Teniers.

The earnest wish for health took him to Töplitz during some weeks of the summer. He went at the height of the season, and many of the German nobility were there. Among them was the King of Prussia. The patient derived no satisfaction from his stay. Towards the close of his residence at Töplitz he wrote despairingly

Another Year's Travel

of the ineffectual nature of the remedy. After a course of baths, he said that he found no benefit, but, in fact, was somewhat weaker. He resolved, however, to continue the baths rather to satisfy others than under the conviction that they were applicable to his case. His *Journal* shows that he thought mercury might be successfully tried. Both Dr. Kreisig and Dr. Clark, an English doctor, condemned this course, the German doctor exhorting him to make trial of the waters of Carlsbad. Wilkie, in turn, declared himself opposed to this project. How, he asked, could Carlsbad be of avail, when Cheltenham and Töplitz were alike futile? He was assured by Dr. Clark that his malady had been, though almost imperceptibly, relieved, and that time would beyond doubt fully restore him. Dr. Clark advocated further travel as a sure means of contributing to the return of the patient's vigour. Wilkie still pleaded for an active remedy; but he finally accepted his doctor's decision. Another year on the Continent was the specific plan laid down by Dr. Clark; Wilkie acted upon this advice, and set out again for Italy.

Prague and Vienna intercepted the traveller on his way back to Italy. At Vienna he met Prince Metternich, who complimented him warmly on his "Reading of a Will." This interview *Vienna* awoke a melancholy reflection. "Once," he wrote, "it would have been symptomatic of the highest prosperity, but strangely in contrast now with my present situation and projects." At Venice he only

Sir David Wilkie

paused to glance again at the brilliant colouring of Titian. He spent several days at Florence. Here

Italy he devoted his leisure to renewing his correspondence with his friends at home. A letter
again addressed to Mr. Gillespie dwells upon the capability of painting as an instrument of religious teaching:—"The talent that has been devoted to the Romish Church, whether rightly or wrongly applied, has been immense. Here is a moral effect; here is that, the employment of intellect, which distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. If the Church of Rome has condemned the art of Talma, it has created that of Raphael: it has been the nurse of the arts, but painting has been its favourite child. The Pagans have been better sculptors than the Christians: theirs was a corporeal system; but it was left for painting, with all its undefinable powers over colour and form, over light and darkness, to represent the mysteries of a spiritual revelation. The art of painting seems made for the service of Christianity. Would that the Catholics were not the only sect who have seen its advantages!"

From Florence Wilkie went to Rome, which was to be his residence for the next six months. Good
Rome news and the agreeable society of a large
once more number of British visitors caused his second acquaintance with Rome to be unquestionably pleasanter than his previous stay had been. He heard from Munich that his "Reading of a Will," about whose fate he was concerned, had been bought for the State Gallery at the price of £1200—exactly

Fêted in Rome

three times its original cost. On Christmas Day he shared the hospitality of Severn the artist, who, a few years before, so grandly solaced Keats. With the dawn of the New Year, the distinguished painter, who was truly "learning in sorrow," was shown a gratifying token of the community's friendliness towards him. On the 16th January the Scottish artists in Rome extended to him their mark of favour by entertaining him to dinner in the Palazzo Astili. The Duke of Hamilton acted as chairman of the gathering, which altogether numbered about fifty. In the company was Sir Robert Liston, the physician, a former friend of Wilkie's father. Wilkie replied to the toast of his health, his speech being directed principally to the enunciation of encomiums on Scotland and the Scots. He reminded those present of an opinion that never deserted him. "The younger students," he said, "should be aware that no art that is not intellectual can be worthy of Scotland." The festival, which was enlivened with the singing of Burns's and other Scottish songs, must have brought with it a delicious glow to the thoughts of the exile.

The death of Sir George Beaumont, which happened on the 7th of February 1827, was a heavy blow to Wilkie. Sir George he recognised not only as an accomplished and shrewd thinker, *Death of Beaumont* but as a friend exceptionally appreciative. From a letter of condolence to Lady Beaumont it may be seen how profoundly he lamented the loss of a friend so esteemed. This grief fell upon him at a

Sir David Wilkie

time when he was far from fitted to bear any strain. In fact, almost by the same post that conveyed his letter to Lady Beaumont there was despatched a communication from Sir Robert Liston to a friend in England, advancing serious fears regarding Wilkie's own health. Sir Robert's purpose was to arouse practical sympathy on behalf of the suffering painter. He concluded by saying that Wilkie had assured him "that no assistance, except from his sovereign, in whose household in Scotland he already holds an honourable office, or from his country at large, can or will he accept."

Lockhart records a pleasing incident with reference to King George's kindly regard for Wilkie during this period of grievous distress. Lockhart's *The King Intervenes* narrative is of such value that it may be given in his own words:—"When the king was informed, which he was in the summer of 1825, that Wilkie's physicians apprehended him to be labouring under a paralytic affection, which did not indeed obscure the rational faculties, but made it impossible for him to exert his mind on any serious subject for more than a very short interval, his Majesty sent his private secretary, Sir W. Knighton (himself a physician of eminence, and much attached to Wilkie), to convey to him the regret with which he had received such intelligence, and his anxiety that no thought about the two or three pictures for the Royal Gallery left unfinished, or about anything else in the shape of business or money, should be allowed to disturb him in

The King's Kindness

the arrangements judged most advisable with a view to his health. As we heard Sir William Knighton himself tell the story—the King said to him, ‘Go to Wilkie—he is proud and shy—he may not want money at all, and it would not do to offer him that: say to him, however, that on your report I entertain a confident expectation of his recovery by-and-by, and have no fear on that score—if he will but consent to be idle for the period recommended by his medical men. Tell him I am so sure of this, that he has my permission to consider me as his banker—so long as he continues to travel, and *does not work*. He may draw for what he wants, and repay me when he comes back, at his leisure, in the shape of pictures. I can never have too many Wilkies in my collection.’” Lockhart adds that Wilkie’s gratitude was most sincere, but that he had no occasion to accept money at that moment, nor afterwards. To judge from Sir Robert Liston’s letter, he had at this time at least contemplated receiving assistance. However, the sale of engravings rescued from the insolvent publishers enhanced the painter’s income, while his prospects, brightening with the access of health, made him confident about preserving his self-dependence.

Wilkie’s vitality suddenly revived. Not more than a month after the despatch of Sir Robert Liston’s letter, he wrote to his brother in high spirits. His joy was quite unbounded: he could paint again, paint with pleasure. He quoted to a friend the saying of Correggio, “Anche io sono

*Sudden
Revival*

Sir David Wilkie

pittore" ("Once again I am a painter"), and commented that Correggio could not have said it with more delight. With his health thus restored, he looked forward with confidence to his departure from Italy. But his love of study, fostered by his congenial occupations among the Italian picture-galleries did not permit him to think of yet returning to England. He determined before doing so to see the picture-galleries of Spain, "the unpoached game preserve of Europe," as he called it. "My great pursuit," he wrote to his sister, "is pictures." Of Velasquez and Murillo he knew the fame; the restless ambition in art that distinguished his life, as it did that of Rembrandt, never ceased to claim him. He now wished to note with critical observation the achievements of the Spanish masters. With this sanguine intention he left Rome at the beginning of May 1827.

Before his departure for Spain he wrote to his brother telling him of the work he had succeeded in doing for the past five months. This consisted of two small pictures and a large one near to completion. It was done, he mentioned, "by little and by little, half-an-hour at a time, and three half-hours per day." He dwells in detail upon the new method which he had adopted. The two small pictures were "The Pifferari playing Hymns to the Madonna" and "The Confessional." The former was bought by George IV., the latter by Mr. James Morrison, of London. The unfinished picture was "Cardinals, Priests, and Roman Citizens washing the Pilgrims' Feet." He forwarded all these directly to

*His
Italian
Pictures*

In Geneva

London. The third picture was not completed till 1829, when Sir Willoughby Gordon became its purchaser, the price being £200.

Geneva was to be a mid-way resting-place. At this town he stayed more than two months. Here he painted "A Roman Princess washing the Pilgrims' Feet," a larger picture than the *Geneva* similarly designed drawing of "The Pifferari." Of this King George was afterwards to become possessor at the price of 250 guineas. The central figure was drawn from "a perfect model" of the Princess Doria, the sitter being a lady whose likeness to the Princess was very striking. The picture created a sensation in the painter's circle of friends at Geneva. The house where he lodged was kept busy with people calling to see the paintings in his new style. But curiosity and criticism he treated with equal placidity. After brief calls at Lyons and Montpellier, he entered Spain at the beginning of October.

CHAPTER VII.

IN SPAIN, AND AFTERWARDS.

Impressions of Spain—Burgos—Madrid—Pictures in the Escorial—Criticism of Murillo and Velasquez—"The Maid of Saragossa"—"The Spanish Posada"—"The Guerilla's Departure"—Washington Irving—Return to England—Patronage of George IV.—Turner—Wilkie's pictures at the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1829—Critics of the New Mode—Illustrates the Waverley Novels—Death of Lawrence—Candidature for presidency of the Royal Academy—Serjeant-Painter—The Holyrood picture—"The Guerilla's Return"—Portrait of Lady Lyndhurst—Portrait of Lord Melville—Portrait of William IV.

WHEN the appearance and customs of the people of a country were not of overwhelming fascination to Wilkie, he was not slow to distinguish and describe the attractions of its scenery. Thus it was with his entrance into Spanish territory. "Even the first sight of the Bay of Biscay," he writes, "gave a new sensation; I recollected that it was the Atlantic which I had not seen for two years; showing from its grey colour, tide-washed sands, and long majestic waves, a striking contrast to the tranquil Mediterranean, to which I had been accustomed." But as he goes inland, there is many a trait

*The Bay
of Biscay*

Arrival in Madrid

of the people that wins his attention. The civil strife that had followed hard upon the cessation of the great Peninsular conflict was still in active prosecution. Twice or thrice the traveller's path was crossed by Government troops on the *Bandits* track of marauders. He must also have seen numbers of the rebels amid their familiar haunts, for such scenes were to form sympathetic themes for his pencil. At Burgos he saw for the first time a posada, an inn of the native type, of which a vivid account appears in one of his letters. Here too he beheld other features of historic interest. The fortress that long baffled the generalship of Wellington was a ruin of no ordinary interest, while the fine Gothic cathedral of the city attracted his eager scrutiny.

On reaching Madrid, the hopes with which he set out on his Spanish tour were in part effectually fulfilled. The capital, it is true, was less picturesque than his imagination had dreamed; but the *Madrid* Escorial—the famous monastery and palace, some twenty-six miles to the west, not yet damaged by fire—held within it visions of art that matched those of Italy. Of the excellence of these he had so far little knowledge; but this only intensified his anxiety to study them. To enhance the charm of the experience that he now enjoyed, there was the association with most welcome friends. At the hotel in Madrid where he lodged he met Washington Irving, whose courtesy was an unfading delight. There were also here Mr. Stanhope and Lord Mahon, of the British

Sir David Wilkie

Embassy, and Prince Dolgorouki, the Russian ambassador. The warmth of the visitor's reception may be gauged from a resolution on the part of Irving, who, although he had proposed departing to Seville for the winter, refrained from doing so on Wilkie's account.

Wilkie did not delay in becoming acquainted with the characteristics of the pictures of the Escorial, "the palace and the church of the sovereigns of Spain." Of works by Correggio, of whom he had ever an enthusiastic opinion, he saw none that was excellent. Nor was his favourite Titian well represented. But it was the native school that inspired his journey to Spain, and it was a gratification, if not a surprise, to him to find that its examples were unrivalled by others of the collection. Morales and Ribera received from him discriminating notice, though he bestowed his full admiration and ripest judgment upon Murillo and Velasquez. Most of what he says of these two painters has never been seriously disputed. The subjoined criticism of these masters he sent to Lawrence:—

"These two great painters are remarkable for having lived in the same time, in the same school, painted from the same people, and of the same age, and yet to have formed two styles so different and opposite, that the most unlearned can scarcely mistake them; Murillo being all softness, while Velasquez is all sparkle and vivacity. To our English tastes it is unnecessary to advocate the style of Velasquez. I know not if the remark be new, but we appear as if identified with him; and while I

*Murillo
and
Velasques*

Two Great Spaniards

am in the two galleries of the Museum, half filled with his works, I can almost fancy myself among English pictures. Sir Joshua, Romney, and Raeburn, whether from imitation or instinct, seem powerfully imbued with his style, and some of our own time, even to our landscape-painters, seem to possess the same affinity. Nothing can be more captivating than the examples of his manner of painting here. The portraits, equestrian and otherwise, of Philip III. and V.; the Duke d'Olivarez, and the little Infante Balthasar, with various portraits of children, decked out in the most fanciful and grotesque manner, are of the happiest effect; and such is his taste for the varieties of character, that there are here six portraits of dwarfs painted, as if they were his most favourite subjects.

“Compared with Murillo, he has more intellect and expression, more to surprise and to captivate the artist; still Murillo is a universal favourite, and perhaps suffers in the estimation of some only because all can admire him; but if he is in some qualities superior to Velasquez, and in design much inferior to the schools of Italy, yet for colour he gives an abstract hue of nature that is much in the manner of Titian and Correggio.”

Detailed impressions of certain paintings of Velasquez, Wilkie sets down in his *Journal*. He estimates very highly two of that artist's landscapes, “Hermits in a Rocky Desert” and “A Dark Wood at Nightfall.” “He is Teniers,” he thinks, “on a large scale; his handling is of the most sparkling description, owing much of its

Sir David Wilkie

dazzling effect to the flatness of the ground it is placed upon." He again compares him to the British school. What he formulates, however, regarding the necessity for glazing has been altogether exploded; nor would it now be held a correct principle to maintain that Velasquez made no use of his ground. To the extraordinary affinity between the portraits by Velasquez and Raeburn he frequently alludes.

Comparative restoration to health incited Wilkie once more to the practice of his art. The inactivity of his pencil, in one to whom his work was as the breath of life, could not be prolonged beyond the period of complete prostration. Work was satisfactorily alternated with hours of studious reflection, and with the further diversity of the distractions of pleasant society. In February 1823 he wrote to a London correspondent that he had completed two paintings on Spanish subjects, and had begun a third, all of considerable size. A letter to his brother about the same date gives particulars of these pictures. He has chosen the subjects, he explains, from their romantic character, and also from their being concerned with the doings of a nation that was at one time the only Continental ally of England. He trusts therefore that if the British people have not forgotten this circumstance, these drawings will do as much for his esteem with his countrymen as any picture that he had yet painted. These pictures were "The Maid of Saragossa," "The Spanish Posada," and "The Guerilla's Departure." "The Maid of Saragossa" was liked most

*His
Spanish
Pictures*



"The Parish Beadle" (p. 98).

30

Spanish Pictures

of all by his friends in Spain; they did so not only by reason of its directness and breadth of handling, but because of its passionate vigour of conception. Wilkie painted this picture when staying at Seville, and here he heard from Irving in Madrid of the excellent impression which it had created in the capital. Irving was perhaps the most appreciative of all the critics with respect to the Spanish pictures, and at this moment he took the opportunity to express his conviction of the improved state of the painter's health since his residence in Spain, citing as proofs the quantity as well as the great merit of the work then done.

The Spanish pictures afterwards included a fourth, painted in England—"The Guerilla's Return." They continued the method adopted in his Italian pictures. Their style is so different from that of his previous paintings that they might well have been attributed to another hand. No particular painter can be directly pointed to as the authority upon whose work Wilkie based his later style. The general conception of this style was derived from the Italian masters, with hints gained from the two celebrated Spanish painters who so decidedly won his esteem. Essentially, his historical paintings were not dissevered from a kinship with the manner of Rembrandt, which distinguished his treatment of "The Parish Beadle." But the four Spanish pictures partake rather of the style of Velasquez than of that of Murillo, favourably as he reckoned the latter's technique.

Sir David Wilkie

Probably the palm in the quartette of Spanish pictures must be awarded to the last of the series. "The Maid of Saragossa," though a strong and attractive picture, has a dash of the theatrical in its style, the figure of the "Maid" having no accurate relation to the events described. "The Spanish Posada," which is a very striking and careful picture, was praised more than the others by the critics of the day. All of these paintings faithfully fulfil the design which the artist had in view—the glorification of the warlike spirit among the Spanish people. "The Maid of Saragossa" deals with the story of the siege of Saragossa by the French in 1808-9; the memory of the heroic struggle of the besieged long remained fresh in England. Wordsworth inscribed congratulatory verses to the defenders. The powerfully drawn figure of the soldier wheeling the gun is a portrait of Palafox, the general who led the Spanish forces when the assault took place on the town. To this portrait Wilkie humorously refers in a letter to his sister. "I have tried," he says, "to restore to him some of the youthfulness of which twenty years and the severities of a French prison have deprived him." Close by the mouth of the gun appears a priest. This figure represents Father Consolación, who served with ability as an engineer throughout the siege. He holds in his hand a crucifix with which he points out the exact place at which the gun should be aimed. A subordinate group occupies a position in the background. The principal personage of this group is another priest, who is writing

“The Spanish Posada”

a despatch. This portrait is a likeness of Boggiero, who played a determined part as a defender of Saragossa, and suffered a cruel fate after its capture by the enemy. “The Spanish Posada” is a picture of a guerilla council of war. The persons include two prominent beyond the rest, a monk of the Escorial and a Jesuit, who are both seated at a table on which are placed papers. Behind these leaders stands a guerilla officer, who consults with them on a scheme of national defence. In the foreground is a common soldier of the guerillas, who is armed with a rifle, and wears a picturesque cloak. A goatherd and a girl are seated on the floor, near them a dog and a pet lamb. Occupying the background are the landlady, who is preparing chocolate, and a mendicant student, bearing a lexicon. A smuggler appears at the doorway. A touch of landscape reproduces a distant view of the Guadarrama mountains.

“The
Spanish
Posada”

The third of the Spanish group of pictures, “The Guerilla’s Departure,” is perhaps the slightest of the whole number. A young guerilla soldier bids farewell to his confessor, and, while doing so, is favoured by the priest with a light from his cigar. This picture lacks expressiveness, and has no shining qualities to make amends for this defect. The story of “The Guerilla’s Return” tells of the hazardous experiences that the Spanish guerilla of those days endured with marvellous tenacity and pluck. A wounded rifleman has reached home, borne thither on a thoroughly

“The
Guerilla’s
Departure”

Sir David Wilkie

fourth of the group, it should be said, was added at the suggestion of King George. For "The Spanish Posada" and "The Maid of Saragossa," the artist was paid 800 guineas each; for the two other Spanish pictures his honorarium was only that sum for both together.

A new light in art had asserted its power in the interval of Wilkie's absence on the Continent. The genius of Turner was being accorded the adequate recognition which for many years had been denied it by the public. Wilkie's appreciation of Turner, while never enthusiastic, was distinctly keener in his later life than it had been in his youth; yet even when most appreciative, his view was qualified. Turner's art he believed to appeal rather to the initiated than to the mass of people, and it was on the artistic methods of this wonderful landscape-painter that he controverted an oft-quoted saying:—"The applause of the exquisite few is better than that of the ignorant many, but I like to reverse received maxims. Give me the many who have admired in different ages Raphael and Claude, and I will give up the exquisite few who can admit of no deterioration of a system that has not yet the trial of time to recommend it: take simplicity from art, and away goes all its influence."

By a contribution of eight pictures, the full tale of exhibits allowed, Wilkie renewed his acquaintance with the Royal Academy at the Exhibition of 1829. They included his three pictures of Spanish subjects, his four Italian pictures, and the portrait of Lord

The New Mode

Kellie. The portrait of Lord Kellie, which deserves the utmost praise in its own line of painting, was a commission from the Town Council of Cupar.

Though begun before the artist's departure for Italy, it leaves an impression of the boldness of drawing and the liveliness of colour that characterised his work subsequent to his residence abroad. Probably a certain finish was afterwards bestowed upon the portrait, emphasising the principles suggested by his foreign studies. *At the R.A., 1829*

The art critics of the day did not spare him when he thus abandoned his well-known style, and upset the orthodox canon that a painter ought to restrict his skill to one peculiar manner.

He did not pay excessive heed to his critics. Cunningham puts it that though a whole storm of criticism was poured upon Wilkie's new pictures and his change of style, the artist endured it with composure. The great public, however, agreed with the critics in condemning these productions of a favourite painter. Haydon alludes to this depression in Wilkie's general popularity, and confesses to his dislike of the altered fashion of his friend's paintings. He, indeed, would make out that this depression was communicated to the painter's own spirits. In the summer of 1829 he made a call upon Wilkie, and was touched by what he alleges to have been his concerned air. "He was pale," says Haydon, "and rather depressed. He has not made the hit this season he imagined he should make." Haydon has a further *Critics of the New Mode*

Sir David Wilkie

allusion to this subject, in which he describes an interview that took place at his own house. The passage is decidedly antagonistic in tone:—"Wilkie liked the Eucles very much indeed. Now he is glazing mad, he was advising me what to do, and I told him to take the palette and do it. He then glazed and muddled a head just in the style he is doing now. . . . I cautioned him as to his disposition in manner and excess for any new idea in his head, which he acknowledged. His pictures are actually becoming black and white patches, like Raeburn's."

About the beginning of 1829 a correspondence passed between Scott and Wilkie as to an illustrated edition of the "Waverley Novels." The two men were at this crisis brought into still more intimate relations than before—through their similar disastrous experiences with their publishing firms. A letter written by Scott at Christmas of this year is full of appreciation of Wilkie's genius and of esteem of him as a man. He points out that, though the painter's modesty will not readily concede the truth of the statement he makes, the permission to adopt designs from Wilkie's brush in an issue of the "Waverley Novels" would be of immense contributing advantage. Wilkie's reply, which is quoted by the editor of Scott's *Journals*, proves with what sincerity of sentiment he contemplated the proposal:—"I pass over all those disastrous events that have arrived to us both since our last, as you justly call it, melancholy parting, to



"The Maid of Saragossa" (p. 130).

U O A

34

Scott and Wilkie

assure you how delighted I shall be if I can in the most inconsiderable degree assist in the illustrations of the great work, which we all hope may lighten or remove that load of troubles by which your noble spirit is at this time beset; considering it as only repaying a debt of obligation which you yourself have laid upon me when, with an unseen hand in the *Antiquary*, you took me up and claimed me, the humble painter of domestic sorrow, as your countryman." The context of this letter, which forms a note in the *Journals*, contains a fine sample of Scott's vigorous and high-minded common-sense. No passage in all these splendid pages is a better reflection of the whole-hearted creator of a long series of immortal personages. Scott begins by saying that Heath, the engraver, has assured him, to his amusement, that the success of the new edition of the "Waverley Novels" will depend entirely on the excellence of the illustrations. He dismisses this information with becoming jocularity. But the words in which he sums up his reflection on Heath's criticism of a portrait of himself which Wilkie had prepared for the edition, shows how poignant could be his regret at even the hint of a meanness. They redound superbly to Scott's honour:—"He touches a point that alarms me; he greatly undervalues the portrait which Wilkie has proposed to give me for this edition. If it is as little of a likeness as he says, it is a scrape. But a scrape be it. Wilkie behaved in the kindest way, considering his very bad health, in agreeing to work for me at all, and I will

Sir David Wilkie

treat him with due delicacy, and not wound his feelings by rejecting what he has given in such kindness." *The Bride of Lammermoor*, *Old Mortality*, and *Peveril of the Peak* were finely treated by Wilkie's pencil in pursuance of this agreement with Scott.

The immediate results of his Continental tour were now over. With health to a marked degree renewed, with fresh modes of work fixed upon, and with the prospect of desirable occupation for his pencil, he could view his further settlement in England very hopefully. Events and tasks of an important nature now made themselves visible in his career, and shaped their own phase of his history.

Sir Thomas Lawrence died on the 7th of January 1830, and his death brought Wilkie's name into prominence as a candidate for the vacant presidency of the Royal Academy. Wilkie mourned the late President with sincere grief. An accomplished painter and urbane gentleman, Sir Thomas always acted towards him with courtesy and evident esteem, and this regard was reciprocal. Before the election, Scott wrote to him earnestly expressing his best wishes in regard to the coveted post. "I cannot but think the loss will be filled up, so far as the presidency is concerned, by adding to it the designation in this letter. All who have heard you, speak in high terms of your powers of eloquence; and of your talents as an artist there can be but one sentiment. I heartily wish, for the honour of the Academy and the electors, that they may be of my

Serjeant-Painter

mind, and I am sure that their judgment will be approved by all Europe." Scott's optimism turned out to be fallacious. At the election Wilkie obtained only two votes, those of Collins and Leslie; the successful candidate was Martin Archer *Shee* *Preferred*. Shee's practical qualifications were good—he was a capable leader of men, was a fluent and graceful speaker, and had established a reputation as a conscientious painter. Leslie affirms that he did not regret the award of the appointment to such an opponent of Wilkie. Yet that there was a consensus of public opinion against the selection may be guessed from a popular witticism of the day. The new president had published, besides other lucubrations, a volume of *Rhymes on Art*, a numerous array of stilted heroics on his especial avocation. His literary proclivities and his elevation to the presidency were satirised in a clever couplet:—

"See Painting crowns her sister Poesy!
The World is all astonished! So is *Shee*."

The day before the Royal Academy election, Wilkie had been chosen Serjeant-Painter to the King. This was thought by his friends as likely to rouse jealousy on the part of the Academicians, and thus to be detrimental to his prospects as a candidate for their official leadership. To judge from his correspondence, he reflected on his defeat with his usual philosophic equanimity. Far otherwise was it with Haydon, for whom the event

Sir David Wilkie

afforded a unique text for a loud and scathing homily. He admitted Shee's qualities of popularity, but he stoutly averred that the example established whereby genuine talent was accounted as not necessary to the foremost rank in the art, was a serious blow inflicted on the dignity of the Academy. He concluded his heavy censures with this telling peroration:—"Here was David Wilkie,—the greatest genius in his walk that ever lived,—the only living artist who has a picture in our National Gallery,—the only painter who has a great European reputation,—honoured by his Sovereign, respected by the nobility, modest, discreet, upright, diligent, and highly gifted,—from whose existence an epoch in British art must be dated,—to whose work our present high rank is owing in the opinion of Europe,—David Wilkie had two votes! And Martin Archer Shee, a man who for forty years has never painted any human creature without making him stand on his tiptoes from sheer ignorance,—in short, the great founder of the tip-toe school,—had eighteen!"

Shortly after Wilkie's return to London, an attempt was made to induce him to engage in a publishing venture. The publication was an "Annual," "*Annals*" so named in accordance with a fashion of the time. These "*annals*" consisted of engravings of the works of contemporary painters, for the use of which the proprietors of the publications gave large sums. Wilkie did in a few cases grant the privilege of reproducing his pictures; but

The Holyrood Picture

so little discrimination was shown in the choice of painters from whose works the engravings were taken, that he very soon disapproved of the scheme, and declined to permit further contributions of his pictures for the use of the publishers of the "Annuals."

Busy again at his art, he expended equal care and patience upon the completion of his large picture on the subject of the King's visit to Edinburgh.

He refreshed his ideas of the environment by a special journey to the Scottish capital.

He made himself acquainted with all the interiors of Holyrood; he noted to the fullest the costume of the chief office-bearers in the procession; the mace and the sceptre were both faithfully copied. *The Holyrood Picture*
In February 1830 he wrote to Sir William Knighton that the Holyrood picture and "The Guerilla's Return" were ready for the King's inspection. When the Royal Academy Exhibition came round, he accompanied these works with a full-length portrait of the King. The portrait of George IV. has considerable boldness of conception and firmness and beauty of colour. The artist believed that it deserved a notable place among his achievements. "I have made this," he said, "the most glazed and deepest toned picture I have ever tried, or seen tried, in these times. It is at once a trial of Rembrandt all over,—the dresses, the accoutrements, and throne gold, a dark background—no white except on the hose and the flesh,—telling as principal lights." The Holyrood picture is marred by staginess; but it has vigour and sureness

Sir David Wilkie

of drawing, while some of the heads are managed with unmistakable power.

The artist's own account of its composition may be summarised as follows. The principal place is occupied by the King; near him are a page and an officer of the yeomen of the guard. Facing the King is the Duke of Hamilton, who presents the keys of the palace. On the right, at the entrance to the palace, stands the Duke of Montrose; beside him is the Duke of Argyll, Keeper of the Household. Close behind appears Sir Alexander Keith, hereditary Knight Marshal; he is attended by two esquires, who bear the sceptre and sword of State. On the left of the picture is the Earl of Hopetoun, arrayed in the garb of the Royal Archers, the King's body-guard in Scotland; and next to him, in the character of historian or bard, is Sir Walter Scott. A body of spectators fill up the rest of the ground of the picture.

During the summer Wilkie completed two portraits, both of indisputable excellence—the portrait of Lady Lyndhurst and that of Lord Melville. The *Two Pictures* portrait of Lady Lyndhurst owes its pleasing effect less to the delineation of the features, though this is admirable, than to the bold and dashing colour that invests the piece. To the portrait of Lord Melville, again, the painter seems to have devoted different manipulation, the head ranking second to none amongst Wilkie's portraits, and evincing a rare mastery of technique. These two works formed his contributions to the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1831.

Portrait of William IV.

The University of St. Andrews commissioned the picture of Lord Melville, who was Chancellor of the University. The Duke of Wellington purchased that of Lady Lyndhurst. For the pictures done at this period handsome prices were generally paid to the artist. For the Holyrood painting, indeed, he reached the high-water mark of his fees, the large figure of 1600 guineas being the payment.

By the death of George IV. there was lost to Wilkie a true and considerate friend. From William IV., however, he experienced no cessation of royal esteem. He was asked to paint the *William IV.* portrait of the new sovereign, whom he found to be full of condescension and good-humour. The portrait of William IV. was ready for the Academy Exhibition of 1832. Wilkie was now eager to enter upon a series of historical paintings, and for several years to come productions of this kind were closely to engage his pencil if not to increase or lend permanence to his fame.

CHAPTER VIII.

CULTIVATING HISTORY.

Wilkie's second style—"The Preaching of Knox before the Lords of the Congregation"—Death of Sir Walter Scott—Royal favours—"Two Monks at Confession"—Commissions from the Duke of Wellington—"The Spanish Mother"—"Sir David Baird discovering the body of Tippoo Sahib"—"Christopher Columbus in the Convent at La Rabida"—"The First Ear-ring"—Portrait of Edward Irving—Wilkie visits Ireland—Irish sketches—"The Smuggling Still at Work"—"The Peep o' Day Boy"—Portrait of the Duke of Wellington—"Napoleon and the Pope"—Knighted—Incidents regarding the Sir David Baird picture—Notes on art—"Queen Victoria's First Council"—"John Knox dispensing the Sacrament at Calder House"—Exhibits of 1840.

RAPIDITY of work was a reason advanced by Wilkie as an inducement to cultivate the line of painting which he so fully adopted after the year 1825. He was no doubt led to consider the necessity for speed of workmanship from the financial perplexities that then beset him with such ominous force. It was but natural and right that if the issue of his new style of painting were satisfactory he should also keep duly before him the practical side of his endeavour. Events disclosed the wisdom of his plan. The pictures in his later style, though covering a com-

*Facility
of Hand*



"John Knox Preaching" (p. 145).

32

“Knox Preaching”

paratively short space of years, considerably outnumbered those of his prime. About sixty pictures belong to the art of his first period; in his second period he painted more than eighty. It has also to be remembered that not only did the list of his paintings increase, but he was also paid on an average decidedly better prices. He cannot fairly be blamed for his resolution, nor can there be any reproach for his success. His weak health alone was an influence upon his action sufficiently urgent and defensible. Yet his conviction of the propriety of his course was at the same time deliberate, and based upon artistic conviction.

To the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1832 Wilkie contributed perhaps the greatest of his historical paintings, “The Preaching of Knox before the Lords of the Congregation.” The painter liked this subject, and, though the proposed picture had not won the approval of George IV., it earned the eulogies of Peel. In whatever aspect the picture may be regarded, in composition, in expression, or in colour, it is commendable. Its verisimilitude is finer than any other of Wilkie’s historical paintings. The composition has great variety and power, while the depth of colour and the arrangement of light and shadow add strikingly to the beauty of the piece. Accuracy of detail is not the least of its merits. On this head Wilkie set an example here as he did elsewhere of the utmost value to painting, and he did so with a perfect grasp of the conditions under which he worked.

“Knox
Preach-
ing”

Sir David Wilkie

The picture embodies an incident of the stormy days of the Scottish Reformation. The scene is the Cathedral Church of St. Andrews, which is limned with truthfulness of detail. Its long aisles, its dim recesses, the symbols, the images are traced with much fidelity. The grouping of the picture is limited to the outstanding political figures of the epoch. Nearest the pulpit are represented some of Knox's intimate friends; these include Bellenden, his secretary, Goodman, his colleague, and Sir James Sandilands, who was Grand Master of the Knights of Malta. The Admirable Crichton, at this memorable date a student of St. Andrews University, is drawn in his cap and gown. To impart additional lustre to this distinguished band, there is Lord Napier of Merchiston, then a youth. Noted public supporters of the Protestant cause are grouped at an interval in front of the pulpit. The most prominent of these figures is that of Morton, leaning on his sword; next to him is the Regent Murray, in deep meditation; the young Earl of Argyll is the third of the group, his face full of earnest resolve; last of all, somewhat behind the other three, is the Earl of Glencairn, whose united qualities of poet, warrior, and enthusiast are concentrated in his fervent gaze. An aisle to the right holds a gathering of ecclesiastics, whose faces are full of suspicion and dislike of the proceedings. These dignitaries are Archbishop Hamilton, Bishop Beatoun of Glasgow, and the Abbot of Crossraguel. The last-mentioned priest owed his place in the picture to his having

Death of Scott

gained fame by his championship of the Roman Catholic Church in a public disputation with Knox. To emphasise the lawlessness of the times, the painter has set beside these ecclesiastics an armed retainer of theirs in the attitude of readiness to fire upon the preacher. In the gallery of the church appear well-known personages in the chronicles of learning. George Buchanan is one; near him may be seen Sir Patrick Learmonth, Provost of St. Andrews, and Andrew Melville, the distinguished scholar and preacher. Professors, students, and scholars of unnamed identity surround this group. The sunshine throws a gleam of light upon the audience, bringing out with exactness the contending emotions that their countenances reveal. Cunningham, speaking from a familiar knowledge of the circumstances in which the picture was painted, says that it was lauded as a triumph of the new style over both cavil and competition. Peel was gratified with the favourable reception which it met with from the public, and his sense of the sterling qualities of the work deepened his regard for Wilkie.

The autumn of 1832 brought a heavy calamity to Wilkie in the death of Sir Walter Scott. It was noticed that at a meeting for the purpose of considering a memorial to Scott, Wilkie *Death of Sir Walter* was deeply affected. A letter of his to Sir William Allan has touching and anxious allusions to the death of Scott, prominent being the expression of a wish that Abbotsford may be secured for Sir Walter's

Sir David Wilkie

family. Along with Collins, he had two days before gone to see "Tamworth tower and town," which pleased him much, a chief link of interest being its ancient association "with the Lord Marmion."

At the close of the year 1832 he was engaged upon a portrait of King William in the uniform of the Grenadier Guards. With the advent of the new year still

another royal compliment was paid to him.

Royal Favours This was a request from Queen Adelaide that he should paint her portrait. In order to

perform this commission, he settled at Brighton. An attack of illness was soon overcome, but the effects did not pass away quickly. As an unusual accompaniment to such attacks, there came upon him a fit of despondency, a feature of which was a haunting fear of the futility of his endeavour as an artist. He unburdened his mind to Collins, whose reply acted as a palliative. Revival of mental energy sent him again to his studio, and a brilliant example of his later pictures ensued—"Two

"Two Monks at Confession" Spanish Monks in the Capuchin Convent at Toledo." The critics have united to praise this consummate picture—the noble simplicity of its composition, the wonderful ease and breadth of its style, the well-judged

contrasts of form, and the grace of expression. The figure of the young monk at confession is the more finely managed of the two personages. Face, hands, and the whole body afford vivid indications of the grief and agitation that perturb his spirit. But the head of the elder monk is also admirable. Responsibility, com-

Columbus as a Subject

passion, solace, each is set there with the skill that only a master could have exerted. This picture was bought by the Marquis of Lansdowne for 300 guineas. A very successful portrait, the Duke of Sussex in Highland costume, was done almost simultaneously with this historical work, and formed an attraction of the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1833.

Wilkie spent the greater part of 1833 in the execution of commissions for the Duke of Wellington. He also added a further sketch to his designs for *The Gentle Shepherd*. These engagements he diversified by a pleasant holiday in the Isle of Wight; as a companion he had the son of Sir William Knighton, who had some taste as an artist. The spring of 1834 brought fresh commissions from the King. Wilkie's correspondence shows that he did not find it so easy to comply with the request as he could have wished. Allusion is made to a request from Mr. Holford that he should paint a picture on the subject of Columbus, a subject that had been previously suggested by Sir William Knighton. The painter did his best in the dilemma, proposing to offer Mr. Holford a picture having Napoleon as its main personage, and to keep the engagement regarding the Columbus picture. An exchange of commissions with Sir William Knighton was finally agreed upon.

The Royal Academy Exhibition of 1834 contained six pictures by Wilkie. They were a portrait of the Queen, "The Duke of Wellington and his Charger," "Not at Home," "The Spanish Mother," the portrait

Sir David Wilkie

of Sir John Leslie, Professor of Natural Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh, and the portrait of a lady.

“*The Spanish Mother*” “The Spanish Mother” gained the largest share of popular applause. Both the King and the Queen expressed their great satisfaction with this picture. It was bought by Sir William Knighton for 200 guineas. Wilkie wrote to Sir William Knighton that its reception at the Academy was very cordial. “The King called me to him when he came before it, and spoke quite loud out as approving of the expression of the child. When the company came afterwards I found all, particularly ladies, approving of this picture, and a nobleman of high rank sent to know if it was bespoke; to which I answered that a kind friend to whom it belonged had, I might venture to say, that attachment to it which arises from its being a subject of his own choice before it was painted.” Wilkie never quite caught in any of his portraits of the Iron Duke an apt similitude of the greatest of British generals. A *Blackwood* critic of the day sarcastically remarked that the portrait of this year represented the Duke as “having a frightened look”—a criticism sufficiently searching. “Not at Home” was a return to the artist’s treatment of humorous subjects, but neither in painting nor in conception does it reach the level of his palmy days as a *genre* painter.

In August 1834 Wilkie was again in Scotland. His journey was taken for pleasure, and also because of an important engagement for a picture. He was asked

Sir David Baird

by Lady Baird to paint a picture representing her late husband, Sir David Baird, in the act of discovering the body of Tippoo Sahib at the capture of Seringapatam. At Edinburgh he called on Sir Robert Liston, whose warm appreciation he sincerely valued; the interview was of a melancholy nature, the distinguished physician having greatly failed in health. He travelled by coach from Edinburgh to Perth, and thence to Fern Tower, Crieff, the residence of Lady Baird. He wrote to his sister of the pleasant glimpses he had of Fife scenery: how, when he passed near to the Lomonds, his eye could note distinctly the landmarks of his native place—The Mount, Wemyss Hall, and Walton Hill. On arriving in Perthshire, he was charmed with the scenery, which reminded him at every turn of Italy. A stay of a few weeks at Fern Tower enabled him to accumulate materials for his picture; returning to London, he was forthwith actively employed upon the accomplishment of his task, the canvas being the largest at which he ever worked. As was his custom, he made a painstaking study of the accessories, which he had ample opportunity to note in the superb collection of the arms and accoutrements of Tippoo Sahib belonging to the King.

*The Sir
David
Baird
Picture*

So determined was Wilkie to omit no chance of vigorous exercise of his pencil that about the end of 1834, and at the beginning of 1835, he carried on no written correspondence. He put forth the best of his strength on his "Christopher Columbus in the Con-

Sir David Wilkie

vent at La Rabida"; but so diligently did he work that he was able to send to the Royal Academy

Exhibits of 1835 Exhibition of 1835 not only this painting, but five additional pieces. These five other pictures were the following:—"The First

Ear-ring"; a portrait of the Duke of Wellington, wearing his active service uniform; a portrait of the Rev. Edward Irving; a portrait of Sir James MacGrigor; and a painting entitled "Sancho Panza in the Days of his Youth." The "Columbus" and "The First Ear-ring" may be fairly named as among the worthiest examples of Wilkie's art, while at least one of the portraits, that of Sir James MacGrigor, is marked by the finest qualities of portraiture.

Washington Irving's *Life of Columbus* yielded the hint for the incident dealt with in the chief of these works. A stranger, travelling on foot, accompanied by a boy, stopped one day at the gate of a Spanish monastery of Franciscans, and asked for bread and water for his child. Friar Juan Perez de Marchena was struck with the appearance of the stranger, and, observing from his air and speech that he was a foreigner, entered into conversation with him. The stranger was Columbus. Columbus was welcomed by the monks, and thereupon submitted to them a chart of the voyage he was about to make. It is this stage of the episode that the picture illustrates. At the side of the explorer is his son Diego, with a small Italian greyhound. Seated opposite is the physician, Garcia Fernandez, for scientific reasons a



1492

"Columbus at La Rabida" (p. 152).

322

“The First Ear-ring”

supporter of the enterprise. Behind him is seen Martin Alonzo Pinza, a distinguished sea-captain, who accompanied the explorer on his voyage. The figure of Columbus is excellently conceived and drawn. The defect of the picture lies in the passivity of the attitudes, which permit of little scope for dramatic expression. But the fine treatment of the personality of Columbus makes this picture noteworthy as a sample of Wilkie's historical compositions. The price at which Mr. Holford bought it was £500. In “The First Ear-ring,” the artist reverted to the mode of painting from which sprang his immense popularity.

The delineation in this piece is of no slight felicity. Yet it is less from the portrayal of character than because of the exquisite drawing and the charming colour the work possesses that it calls for praise. Wilkie seldom rendered quite happily the features of women. Certain of his critics, Ruskin perhaps being the most formidable, have insisted that his sense of female beauty was defective. Undoubtedly, none of the three female faces of this group attains to the stamp of loveliness, or indeed of winning attraction. But the picture captivates by the fineness of its deft and patient mastery of technique. The study of Edward Irving's portrait has an especial value from his being the model of Knox in Wilkie's great historical pictures relating to the Scottish Reformer.

In 1835 Wilkie was led through the wish for further novelty of theme to consider the domestic life of the

Sir David Wilkie

Irish people as a new artistic mine. The brightness and humour of the Irish nature could not fail to appeal to him, and promised the likelihood of a vigorous response, though it is probable that lack of intimate knowledge militated against his rendering of Irish character. This possible deficiency seems to be borne out by the few specimens of his work that were due to his Irish studies. There is an insincerity of manner about the best of his paintings on Irish subjects that is never to be observed in his scenes of Scottish life. To be the mirror of nature his painting for the nonce could not attain.

For these Irish sketches, Wilkie thought upon a number of subjects that did not ripen. When he reached Dublin, he worked at various scenes, not one of which was completed. They were on such themes as these:—"The Dreamer," "The Jaunting Car," "A Street Scene," and "Peasants with a Dog." Although the fruits of his contemplation were slight, he was thoroughly cognisant of the picturesqueness of the people and the scenes of his travels. On the shores of Dublin Bay it occurred to him that here Velasquez, Murillo, and Salvator Rosa would have found fit subjects for their peculiar genius. The mass of the people, in fact, curiously impressed him with the suggestion of Italian and Spanish physiognomy. Leaving Dublin, accompanied by two friends, he journeyed due west till he viewed the Atlantic, his destination being Lord Sligo's residence at Westport. Thence he proceeded southwards through the mountains of Connemara, the

Irish Pictures

people of which district also struck him as having a Spanish look. The primitive simplicity of their customs he considered very remarkable. Nowhere in Ireland was he more delighted with the pictorial characteristics of the inhabitants. The dress of some of the women, he said, brightened up a cabin or a landscape "like a Titian or Giorgione." He continued his journey to the Lakes of Killarney. From here he went to Cork, and then again to Dublin. The region of Killarney was a transcendent pleasure. In richness of colour, and in originality of character, Connemara was all that his expectation had fancied ; but the scenery of Southern Ireland engrossed his ever quick eye for landscape, and he wrote of the famous lakes that, "for beauty and grandeur," he had never seen anything to surpass them.

This romantic wandering could not fail to be very suggestive to Wilkie, and, on his return to London, he meditated a somewhat important series of Irish paintings. Ten of these *Irish Pictures* were contemplated, but only two received shape. All the subjects promised results of interest. They were as follow :—"A Nun at Confession," "A Smuggling Still at Work," "The Moonlight Flitting," "A Hedge School," "The Wool Spinner," "Interior of a Galway Cabin," "The Novice, Limerick," "King's County Cabin," "Nuns Relieving the Poor," and "The Peep o' Day Boy." "The Smuggling Still at Work" and "The Peep o' Day Boy" were the two subjects in this list that the painter was to raise into the rank of

Sir David Wilkie

creations. For the purpose of verifying his notions of Irish character, he consulted so trustworthy an authority as Maria Edgeworth. She did not think favourably of his manner of treating either the features or the dress of the Irish peasant, though her criticism doubtless contributed to a greater precision of detail. Wilkie's contemporary *Blackwood* critic spoke of the woman in "The Peep o' Day Boy" as Wilkie's best attainment in the delineation of women. It is not easy to reconcile this statement with Lockhart's opinion of "The Maid of Saragossa," which he contemned as "a pompous piece of imbecility." The "Maid" and the woman of "The Peep o' Day Boy" have a close resemblance as regards drawing, which looks hard, and as regards manner, which is rather transpontine. "The Peep o' Day Boy," otherwise called "The White Boy's Cabin," was bought by Mr. Vernon for 350 guineas.

At the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1836 Wilkie had his two Irish pictures and four other pieces. These other pictures were "The Duke of Wellington writing a Despatch on the Night before the Battle of Waterloo," "Napoleon and the Pope in conference at Fontainebleau," the portrait of Lord Montagu, and the portrait of Mr. Esdaile. The portrait of the Duke of Wellington attracted eulogistic comment at the Academy, and it is certainly the happiest effort made by Wilkie to present the lineaments and form of the Iron Duke. The head is especially well done. It was objected by

“Napoleon and the Pope”

some that the picture did not tell its story. The reply is obvious — that it would baffle the art of the pencil to demonstrate fully, as was urged by adverse critics, that such an event as is here portrayed, refers to the eve of the battle, and not to its termination. The carrying out of a feat of this kind would entail the existence of a species of mental photography. The picture of “Napoleon and the Pope” is lauded by competent judges like Leslie as worthy of the noblest examples of British art. It affords excellent room for the play of contrasts, and this has been admirably achieved by the painter. It is simple, bold, and natural in conception, while the technique is fittingly sustained. The episode commemorated is a dramatic inter-
*“Napoleon
and the
Pope”*
view between Napoleon and Pius VII. The Pope, after the seizure of Rome by Napoleon, refused to give canonical institution to the French clergy. He was therefore seized by Napoleon’s orders, and imprisoned at Fontainebleau. Here he remained several months. The meeting which Wilkie illustrated took place on the 19th of January 1813. Then, as Mr. John Morley has said, the autocracy of Napoleon was powerfully challenged by “the victorious fortitude of an old man who stood for a tradition and ideal in the Vatican at Rome.” The Emperor exerted all his powers of persuasion to win the pontiff to his own way of thinking; but, though they agreed on certain points, there were stipulations upon which Pope Pius sternly insisted. The writer of the biography in *The Wilkie Gallery* has well summarised

Sir David Wilkie

the intrinsic elements of this picture:—"It is the contest between the two great powers, the spiritual and the military, which then divided between them the empire of Europe. That poor old man, a helpless captive in the hands of the victor of a hundred battles, yet feels himself possessed of a far mightier influence than that of brute force. . . . The painter has finely diffused over the features of the venerable pontiff this sense of inward dignity and power, as well as depicted the baffled and irritated look of Napoleon, encountered by a spirit as resolute as his own, against whom his menaces are powerless."

In June of this year Wilkie was knighted. The announcement of the honour was made to him by

Lord John Russell, who did a good deal to *Knighted* bring about the distinction. He bore his honour becomingly. But Haydon, with his turn for suspicions, was thereafter offended by what he believed to be an unkindly reception on the part of his friend. Yet it can be inferred from his account of the incident that the comrades had always a predominant mutual esteem. The following is his description of the treatment by Wilkie which he did not like, and of its sequel:—

"Called on Wilkie. He kept me so long waiting that I rang the bell and asked the servant if he was up. She said he was at breakfast. I said, 'Have you a fire anywhere? I am cold and will take a walk,' and I marched off.

"This was nothing but his want of manner. Just

Haydon and the Knight

as I was sitting down to dinner a knock came to the door. I said, 'That's Wilkie.' Mary said, 'No, no.' In came the servant and said, 'Sir David Wilkie.' I went up and rowed him well for keeping me in the cold. He said, 'I was breakfasting.' I said, 'That's no matter; you should have come out.'

"He came down and chatted. I asked him before Mrs. Haydon, if he remembered my lending him an old black coat to go to Barry's lying-in-state, which was too short for his long arms. He did, and seemed to relish it. I asked him if he recollected dancing round the table with Jackson when I read his name for the first time in a paper, *The News*. He said he did. I asked him if he remembered my breakfasting with him the first time in Norton Street front parlour. He did. He told some capital things. When Sir Walter was a child his mother and family were all dressed one evening to go out. There was a long discussion. Sir Walter remembered his mother saying, 'No, no. Watty canna understand the great Mr. Garrick.' Scott used to tell this, and always was indignant at the supposition."

Wilkie's picture of Sir David Baird kept him earnestly occupied for nearly a couple of years. When the picture was not long begun, Lady Baird wished an alteration made, bearing upon the relations of the British to the conquered Hindus. She thought that the dogs should be taken out of the picture in deference to the "fallen enemy." Wilkie defended their admission from their lending

"Sir
David
Baird"

Sir David Wilkie

animated effect; but he immediately agreed to the change suggested by her ladyship. When pursuing his wonted quest after fidelity of presentment, he experienced a tantalising obstacle, of which he writes very amusingly:—

“While engaged in collecting studies for the picture, I was told that there were three Hindu cavalry soldiers every day at the India House, who had come overland to complain of some grievance. I obtained their consent to sit to me, and they came, a jemidar and two inferior officers, in their native dress. I explained to them, by the interpreter, what I wanted, and put them on a platform in a group, the jemidar as Tippoo, reclining with his head supported by one of his lieutenants, and his hand held by the other, with his finger on his pulse, to know if he were alive or dead. The group was magnificent, and I was all ecstasy to realise such a vision of character and colour. It was, indeed, a vision and a vision only; for, all of a sudden, the youngest of them said, ‘Me no Tippoo!’ and sprang from his position, while the others repeated, ‘No Tippoo I! No Tippoo I!’ and, to my surprise, left their places also; and no persuasion I could use could induce them to resume them. Thus thwarted, I asked if the jemidar would be drawn as one of the Company’s officers; to this he consented, if allowed to stand like a soldier; in this way I made a drawing of him. One of the lieutenants came for two days, evidently pleased with his new position; for I had put a sword in his hand, and placed him in the atti-



"The First Ear-ring" (p. 153).

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“Sir David Baird”

tude of an assailant. They have now given up coming altogether.”

A subsequent statement of Wilkie's forms a pleasant corollary to this narrative of misadventure. He remarks that, on finishing the picture, he thought the Indian costumes gave great effect and character to all.

The Sir David Baird picture did not obtain the applause which the artist expected, and which it deserved. It is dramatically conceived, and its boldness of colour is quite effective. Haydon found fault with it for its lack of grace, yet hardly justified his objection by his summary of its demerits. A valuable testimony to the accurate likeness it presents of Sir David Baird was supplied by the artist's old friends, Joanna Baillie and her sister, who called at his house when he was painting this picture. They had no idea in what direction his work at that time lay; but they had once seen Sir David Baird in Edinburgh, and so lively was the impression of the likeness that, on entering Wilkie's painting-room they exclaimed aloud, “See, there is Sir David Baird!” Probably the finest drawing in the picture is that of the British woman who, holding a lantern, points out the fallen rajah to the victorious general.

The scene of the picture is laid in the gateway of the fort at Seringapatam. In the foreground Tippoo Sahib lies dead at the feet of Sir David Baird. Round them are native chiefs and Indian soldiers, to whose figures and dress a forcible contrast is produced by the attitude and uniforms of British soldiers. Wilkie wrote an

Sir David Wilkie

interesting memorandum on this picture, dwelling upon its slight infringement of history—there having been in reality no such dramatic circumstances as he bodied forth. He cites Shakespeare and Schiller in defence of his plan, the examples adduced being the combat between Richard III. and Richmond at Bosworth, and the quarrel between Elizabeth and Mary at Fotheringhay. The painting was hung in the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1839 in the best place. By a curious coincidence Wilkie was able to point out at the Academy dinner that that day was the fortieth anniversary of the capture of Seringapatam. For this picture he was paid 1500 guineas.

Sir William Knighton's death in October 1836 deprived Wilkie of an attached and unselfish friend. Sir William Knighton, by his loyal and considerate counsel, had lightened the seriousness of the loss of Sir George Beaumont. The end of the year found Wilkie eagerly expressing his pleasure in the doings of Collins, who was spending a holiday in Italy. He urged him to note what technical facts he could as to figures and buildings, "and, if possible, Italian skies, which, with the green sea and shipping, are the same as Claude and Salvator had to paint, and since whose time no one is better qualified to render with true brilliancy than yourself."

As an alternative to the routine of artistic labour, Wilkie set about the preparation of a series of reflections on art. These opinions, though little more than brief jottings, contain vigorous and penetrative thinking. Their central aim is to explain his own practice, and

Notes on Art

to tell artists how to work in the spirit of their age. The width of his outlook is the salient fact that confronts the reader. He holds that sculpture may be devoted to the treatment of other forms than those of allegorical gods, and that the mere legend of mediævalism did not compose the value of its creation in painting. He advocates the diffusion of art through its concern in every sphere of human activity. As a deduction from this view, he declares that nobility of thought and heroism of action flourish in our midst with less vitality than they should. These remarks may be regarded as a sort of "Apologia" by Wilkie, two-thirds of the essay being devoted to the exposition of historical painting and portrait-painting.

*Notes on
Art*

The remarks on painting were written and arranged simultaneously with the preparation of several noteworthy pictures. The Sir David Baird picture was done alongside of this piece of authorship; and there were also ready about this time "Mary, Queen of Scots, escaping from Lochleven Castle," "The Empress Josephine and the Sorceress of San Domingo," and "The Cotter's Saturday Night." These three works he sent to the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1837. They were accompanied by four portraits—those of William IV., the Earl of Tankerville, Sir William Knighton, and Thomas Wilkie, the last-mentioned bearing the title, "Portrait of a Gentleman Reading." The picture dealing with the Empress Josephine is generally looked upon as the best of this collection. The portrait of the artist's brother

Sir David Wilkie

Cunningham calls "a fine picture, the attitude bold and natural." The three large pictures were bought by private purchasers, Mr. Edward Tunno paying 600 guineas for "Mary, Queen of Scots, escaping from Lochleven Castle." This was the highest figure reached by any of the three pictures. In 1837 the Royal Academy was removed from Somerset House to the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square, and it was in the new surroundings that Wilkie's pictures for 1836 were exhibited. This year, too, he changed his residence to Vicarage Place, Kensington.

A historical event of no ordinary moment occurred in the summer of 1837, with the accession of Queen Victoria. At the meeting of the Royal Academy called to celebrate the event, *Accession of Victoria* Wilkie seconded the address to the Queen, which was proposed by Phillips. His office as Serjeant-Painter to the Sovereign was renewed. Queen Victoria signified her appreciation of his genius by commanding him to paint for her a picture of her first Council. She named the persons whom she wished to appear in the picture. When he came to paint the portrait of the Queen, her graciousness and charm of demeanour greatly touched him. He writes to Collins:—"Having been accustomed to see the Queen from a child, my reception had a little the air of that of an early acquaintance. She is eminently beautiful, her features nicely formed, her hair worn close to her face, in a most simple way. Her manner, though trained to act the Sovereign, is yet

“Queen Victoria’s First Council”

simple and natural.” This picture he contributed to the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1838. Its chief companion was “The Bride’s Toilet.” There were also four portraits by Wilkie in the exhibition, Daniel O’Connell being the most interesting person they represented, and his portrait the best.

The painting of “Queen Victoria’s First Council” required all Wilkie’s tact to accomplish an arrangement of the sitters to his own mind. Official jealousy signalled the struggle for places. Interference is even said to have gone so far as the suggestion that the artist should make a more abundant application of his colours. The portraits are mostly accurate and telling likenesses. In the background are the Duke of Argyll, the Earl of Albemarle, the Right Honourable George Byng, and C. C. Grenville. Among the other personages are the Marquis of Lansdowne, Lord John Russell, Lord Melbourne, Lord Palmerston, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Aberdeen, Lord Lyndhurst, the Duke of Wellington, Sir Robert Peel, the Duke of Sussex, and Lord Holland. For beauty and vigour of workmanship this picture vies with the best of Wilkie’s historical works.

While keeping up a course of activity at his easel, he lightened his exertions by going on a holiday to the North of England and into Scotland. To this he gave part of the autumn of 1838. *Holidays* During this tour he attended a meeting of the British Association at Newcastle. Here he accepted an invitation from the Duke and Duchess of North-

Sir David Wilkie

umberland to visit Alnwick Castle. On reaching Scotland, he made a run to Dunglass, near which is Calder House, which he meant to select as the ground of a second Knox picture. The title was to be "John Knox dispensing the Sacrament at Calder House." The picture was

"Knox Dispensing the Sacrament" begun with the fullest promise of success, but was never finished—the result being the beautiful fragment that adorns the walls of the Scottish National Gallery. Two years after he thought of beginning this picture he wrote to a friend describing its favourable progress. This letter supplies a good idea of the arduous pains which he always spent upon his works:—"With a certain class of subjects it is necessary to put in much that is imaginary, without authority, and to leave out much unadapted for painting. The hall which you have stated as modernised, I am obliged to restore to what will recall an ancient hall of that period: the chimney I ornament; decorate the walls with the pilasters now there to suit; and I must try to renew the carved screen which you say divided the room in old times from the entrance. I also put in many people, and those more varied in rank than could well have been there. I mean to put in the Lord and Lady Lorn, the Regent Murray, perhaps also Morton, and the aged Earl of Argyll. I also wish to introduce in a prominent place the Knight of St. John (Sir James Sandilands)."

Next year Wilkie revisited Scotland; he went to Culter, and while in Fife was the guest of Lord and Lady Leven at Melville House, and of the Fergusons of

Exhibits of 1840

Raith. At Raith he painted the portrait of Mrs. Ferguson. He afterwards travelled to Arbutnot House, Kincardineshire, to paint the portrait of Lord Arbutnot. Returning to London, he was continuously at work preparatory to the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1840. The speed of performance which distinguished his later from his early style enabled him to multiply his paintings to such a degree that *Exhibits of 1840* he again contributed to this Exhibition the full number permitted. In the number were these—"Benvenuto Cellini presenting for the Approval of Pope Paul III. a silver vase of his own workmanship," a scene from *The Gentle Shepherd*, and "The Irish Whisky Still." There were three portraits, "Queen Victoria in her Robes of State," "Viscount Arbutnot," and "Mrs. Ferguson of Raith." The "Benvenuto Cellini" has received very high praise from the critics. Haydon called it "exquisite"; Cunningham held it to be a "picture that Reynolds would have loved to praise—a complete Sir Joshua all over." The portrait of Mrs. Ferguson is one of the most successful of all Wilkie's portraits of women.

CHAPTER IX.

JOURNEY TO THE EAST, AND DEATH.

Departure for Palestine—The Hague—Vienna—The Gates of the East—Constantinople — “The Turkish Letter-Writer”—Portrait of the Sultan—Smyrna—Jerusalem—The Dead Sea level—Opinion of sacred art among the Venetian painters—Homeward bound—Portrait of Mehemet Ali—Last illness and burial—Haydon’s tribute—Letter of condolence from the President and Council of the Royal Academy—The meeting at the Thatched House Tavern—Statue by Joseph—Eastern sketches—Portrait of Hallicoo Mirza—Admiral Walker’s daughter—Portraits of Turkish women—Portraits of Turkish soldiers and servants—Sacred subjects—Turkish scenes—Prices of Wilkie’s pictures.

SOMEWHAT suddenly, in 1840, Wilkie announced his intention of going to Palestine. Rumour attributed to him diverse motives for his contemplation of this step. His real purpose was to gather impressions for his art from the ground upon which as on a page the events of sacred story were indelibly written. The state of his health was supposed to be an influential reason directing him to this journey; but there is no evidence as to this. Moreover, though on this tour he painted a portrait of the Sultan and another of Mehemet Ali, both of which secured places

*To the
East*



"Napoleon and the Pope" (p. 157).

1901

Journey to the East

in the royal gallery, these, again, formed at the outset no plea for his wish to travel. Such subordinate interests, no doubt, contributed to affect his main plan, and to this extent there was a certain amount of truth in the reports that fluttered London society previous to his departure to the East. He was accompanied by Mr. Woodburn, a warm friend and a former fellow-traveller. He decided that his route should be through Holland, thence to Munich and Constantinople, and finally to Jerusalem.

His survey of the Dutch masters at The Hague renders it clear how decisively his opinion about painting had been turned into a new channel by his recent Continental studies. "One feels wearied," he writes in his *Journal*, "with the perfections of the Dutch paintings, and finds relief in contemplating even the imperfect sketches and incomplete thoughts of those great Italians." Rembrandt, however, still fascinated him. In the Town Hall, at Amsterdam, he was greatly delighted with the gusto and freedom of "The Syndics," and viewed several of his portraits with unfeigned admiration. Nimeguen reminded him of Cuyp. Cologne was of especial interest because of Rubens's grand picture on the walls of the church of St. Peter. He thought the composition of this painting very fine, though the colour appeared of inferior quality. Cologne did not long delay the travellers; fifteen days after they left London they arrived at Munich. Here the Rembrandts of the

*Wearied
of the
Dutch*

Sir David Wilkie

Pinakothek were a disappointment, but the Rubenses were as great as ever. In the room set apart for the modern school he saw "The Reading *En Route* of a Will." The colours had become more mellow; the hue was deep and rich, and the picture appeared to be well-preserved. From Munich Wilkie went to Vienna, where he saw another of his own productions—"The Bride's Toilet." Save for its looking slighter than he expected, it satisfied his hopes. Yet to his *Journal* he contributed a melancholy jotting upon this picture. "Most sensible of its defects," is the entry. "I felt only the more grateful for the honour paid to my humble labours by so distinguished a person as Mr. Arthabur, in its having a place in so important a situation, where art and nature seem to combine to render all around beautiful."

A land of hitherto unapproached picturesqueness and charm dawned upon Wilkie's gaze as he passed down the Danube. The typical beginnings of the *The Gates of the East* bright and storied East he saw with the assured and penetrating eye of the artist. His letters everywhere unfold this. The scenery, the aspect of the people, and their customs and occupations, the Eastern dress, all are noted and discussed with fidelity and eagerness of view. Now a dash of colour, now the pose of a speaker, now the quaint employment of a workman, engages his eye and lends piquancy to his narrative. Nor was this all. Eye and pencil seldom failed each other when Wilkie's inspiration

Constantinople

was perfectly untrammelled, and numerous sketches ensued from his ardent apprehension of the scenes amid which he now travelled. Both his letters and his drawings on this Eastern journey tell of the completeness of the enthusiasm with which he was moved.

At Constantinople, it is curious to notice, the spell thrown over him by the appearance of the people fairly eclipsed the attractiveness of an environment of singular beauty. He has not *Constanti-*
a word to say of the scenery to which *nople*
Byron inscribed verse of true descriptive magic. Doubtless he enthusiastically heeded, but he has left no chronicle of his surroundings at Stamboul—

“The land of the cedar and vine,
Where the flowers ever blossom, the beams ever shine ;
Where the light wings of Zephyr, oppressed with perfume,
Wax faint in the gardens of Gul in her bloom.”

He preferred to set down his impressions of the romantic-looking inhabitants, “with dresses splendid and dwellings wretched, still recalling, in all their doings, a race and a time from which civilisation had sprung.” In Constantinople he met pleasant English friends; the most eminent were Lord Ponsonby, Sir Moses Montefiore, and Admiral Walker, commander of the Turkish fleet. His pencil was diligently employed. Not long after he began his residence at Constantinople he drew his happy sketch entitled “The Turkish Letter-Writer”; and this was to be followed by a continuous and attractive series of drawings. This

*“The
Turkish
Letter-
Writer”*

Sir David Wilkie

piece has been lauded as having the richness of a Rembrandt or a Correggio. It was bought by Lord Charles Townshend for 425 guineas. Very soon the Sultan commissioned Wilkie to paint his portrait. His preparations were at once made, including the construction of a new easel by a French carpenter. A Prussian artist was already at the task of fulfilling a like commission, and this circumstance, together with the near celebration of the festival of Ramazan, interrupted the arrangement with Wilkie. He doubted accordingly whether the shortness of his stay in the Turkish capital would admit of his executing the portrait of the Sultan. Matters, however, were managed so as to remove any impediment to his plans.

The time was a stirring one in Turkish politics. The siege of St. Jean d'Acre, held by Mehemet Ali, was being prosecuted by a body of European troops—British, French, and Turks. Those were days of keen suspense, and Wilkie said that it gladdened the hearts of all the inhabitants of Constantinople, Turk, Jew, and Christian alike, when news came of the defeat of Mehemet Ali. The pacification of Palestine was now assured. Returning troops and prisoners of war poured daily into the city, and there was a general sense of warlike fervour in the air.

The painting of the Sultan's portrait was duly carried out. The Sultan gave sittings at the Winter Palace. The portrait was not completed at Constantinople, but enough was done to enable the artist to finish it from

The Sultan

memory. It does not form a felicitous picture, though this probably was not altogether the fault of the artist. The Sultan is represented in a seated posture. There is a lack of power in the lines of the figure: it is featureless, and generally rather angular. Reschid Pasha, who was much pleased with the Sultan's portrait, also sat for a drawing. Wilkie, having brought to a termination the most important item of his engagements at Constantinople, sent the picture of the Turkish ruler in a case to England, and thereafter began his preparations for leaving the city. Before his departure, he had a touch of illness. The doctor prescribed for a cold; but he also observed a distinct weakness in the condition of the eyes. Within a few days, however, the patient was almost convalescent.

*The
Sultan*

At Smyrna, where Wilkie and his companion next landed, they found fresh entertainment in the study of the people's aspects and ways, though there is no mention of the well-known beauty of the Greek women, as in Kinglake. The spot reminded Wilkie of the fact that it was the first town on his journey which is mentioned in Scripture. Once his observation was caught by a group of persons of impressive appearance at the office of the steamship company. These, he was told, were European Jews proceeding on a mission to Palestine. The reflection crossed his mind that his own journey was thus more than a mere travelling excursion, for it was transacted by the side of men who "from age, pursuit, and family

Smyrna

Sir David Wilkie

descent, give to this wayfaring progress the most sacred character."

The travellers remained two days at Smyrna. Going forward on their journey, they steamed past Rhodes, beholding the spot where tradition placed the Colossus, the existence of which, after paying exact attention to the physical nature of the locality, Wilkie presumed feasible as a historical fact. For one day they stopped at Cyprus. Next day, to the artist's extreme pleasure, Palestine was in sight—"Mount Lebanon and its snowy summit right ahead, the sun just rising, and darting its rays from behind."

Beyrout, Jaffa, Ramleh, then for some miles a sequestered and lonely road, and Wilkie's strong aspiration was answered by a view of Jerusalem. His imagination was evidently roused to a great degree by his nearness to a shrine that very truly held for him the glory *Jerusalem* and the historical permanence of a divine faith. He frequently refers with emotion to this hour of his life. His impressions on the brink of his goal are perhaps stated with most effect in a letter to Peel. After acknowledging his satisfaction that he has been permitted to see Jerusalem with his "own natural eyes," he proceeds:—"Here after centuries of ruin and suffering, Jerusalem exists in her greatness. She is elevated on the high tableland of Judæa, 2500 feet above the level of the sea. Except the Mount of Olives, scarce any hill near rises above her. Her walls, which encompass her on every side, are higher and more superb than any city walls I have ever seen. The square

Jerusalem

towers of her gates recall those of Windsor Castle; while their lengthened elevation, with the spires and cupolas they enclose, would have arrested the Poussins and Claudes in preference to all other cities. Her streets are stone-built, massive, surmounted by arches, through which the solemn vista claims the painter's art, though by that art still unknown and unrepresented; and the people, the Jew, the Arab, and the more humble and destitute, who never change, recall, by their appearance, a period of antiquity in everything removed from the present time.

"But besides the habits of man, and the stately fashion of his dwelling, which here bears the mark of no modern date, there are other features that carry the impress of sacred history which scarcely any time can change. This I strongly felt a few days ago, when ascending from the vale of Jordan by the way of Jericho. I was particularly struck, as we got near to Jerusalem, with the beautiful aspect of a village that was over against us, like Tivoli or Lerici: it was Bethany, the abode of Mary and Martha, and the scene of the raising of their brother Lazarus from the dead. From this the road winds round the Mount of Olives, by a path often frequented by Our Saviour, which opens upon the most beautiful view there is of Jerusalem."

Mr. Young, the British Consul at Jerusalem, was a kindly host. Throughout his sojourn in the city, which lasted over a month, Wilkie drew incessantly. For beauty of outline and skilful disposition of details, these drawings, like all the work that he did on this

Sir David Wilkie

Eastern journey, are worthy of his best achievement. The town of Bethlehem, the Mount of Olives, the

Sketches in Palestine Dead Sea, and other places closely associated with the Scripture narrative, naturally possessed for him a powerful attraction.

At Bethlehem he made drawings, and precisely examined the locality and its relics. Of later embellishments of the spot, he observed two pictures which, designated by Chateaubriand as Murillo's work, he did not credit as having come from the hands of that painter. The Mount of Olives conveyed to him an impression approaching sublimity. A commanding position gave him a view of the city, which he considered, "after all the destruction and rebuilding she has gone through, the most solemn and splendid I have ever seen." The Dead Sea had been for some years of Wilkie's life a centre of scientific interest, and now he consumed part

The Dead Sea of his leisure in investigations as to its physical structure. The discovery that the Dead Sea was greatly below the level of the Mediterranean was made in 1837 by more than one inquirer. The facts were therefore of recent note when Wilkie reached Palestine, and he threw himself energetically into the plan of corroborating the discovery. This step did not come from his own initiative; it was suggested by Mr. Harvey, a friend whom he met at Constantinople. Mr. Harvey presented him with a barometer, requesting him to make an observation of altitude at the Dead Sea. Accordingly, Wilkie, along with Mr. Woodburn and Mr. L. R. Beadle, an American



0054

"Queen Victoria's First Council" (p. 165).

32

Wilkie on Scripture Art

missionary, conducted observations for several days in February and March, their labours leading them to the conclusion that the scientific theory was correct. In a letter to Mr. Harvey, Wilkie wrote that the European residents in Palestine believed that no barometer had ever before been used at the Dead Sea; and he advised him, therefore, when his statement had been fully drawn up, to establish his claim to the priority of this species of observation.

How strongly Wilkie felt on the necessity for greater truthfulness in the reproducing of Eastern scenes is plain from frequent remarks to correspondents. To Collins, whose judgment he much respected, he refers to this point in words of significant weight:—"The traveller here must be surprised to find that the great mass of Italian Scripture Art is in backgrounds, costume, and character so purely imaginary, or so completely Italian, that evangelical Syria is entirely unrepresented, and, like a neglected constituency, seems to clamour for a fresh enfranchisement with modern art. And if there are such pictures of the 'Entombment,' the 'Crowning of Thorns' of Titian, various of the figures of Paul Veronese, Giorgione, and Sebastian del Piombo, who, being Venetians, had most intercourse with Jerusalem manners, that do remind you of Syria; and if the splendid conceptions of Raphael, Michael Angelo, and Correggio accord with the finest generalised nature in all countries, yet with respect to the great crowd of Scriptural representations by which, with a sort of glut,

*Wanted—
a Luther!*

Sir David Wilkie

all future art must be inundated, I need only say a Martin Luther in painting is as much called for as in theology, to sweep away the abuses by which our divine pursuit is encumbered."

As was always the case with Wilkie, when he felt keenly, he repeated this idea in even more precise phrases in his *Journal*. Here, when touching upon this subject, he expresses the belief that the Venetians, perhaps from their trade with the Levant, have of all painters given the most faithful idea of the Syriac people. He thinks at the same time that Michael Angelo, with his wonderful designs of old men and sibyls, almost caught the likenesses of venerable Jews of the Holy City. While deprecating the notion that modern reproductions of Jewish types would adequately represent the characters of Scripture, he argues that they might go a considerable way to do so. He is of opinion, above all, that there are so many objects in modern Palestine incapable of change, that had these been known to the painters of Italy, they could not have resisted adopting hints from them for the further perfecting of their works.

Wilkie left Jerusalem on the 12th of April 1841. He sojourned briefly at Damietta and at Alexandria, but saw nothing to charm except the splendour of the Nile. At Alexandria, however, he was *Homeward Bound* honoured with a request to paint the portrait of no less a personage than Mehemet Ali. The doughty chief welcomed the painter gladly when he called at his house. Of this interview Wilkie has a fitting chronicle:—

Mehemet Ali

“Went with Mr. Woodburn and Mr. Terry, who presented us to his Highness Mehemet Ali: he was seated in a garden. He received me most graciously, and we had coffee. On being told that I had painted the Sultan, he asked if I had it here; on my telling him it was gone to England, said he was desirous of having a copy of it. I said it could only be done in London. His Highness then desired I would make a picture for him of himself: asked how many sittings? I said three. He asked when? I said to-morrow morning; but that his Highness must sit in a room. He sent me to look at a room, and fixed nine o'clock to-morrow morning.”

*Mehemet
Ali*

As with the Sultan, the artist had difficulty in satisfying this Egyptian potentate. As the portrait progressed Mehemet Ali criticised it very freely. He objected at one stage that it looked too young for him. Then he pointed out that the markings of the brow and round the eyes ought to be made stronger. Wilkie explained to him that he did not wish to paint minor details, but the expression of the face; he conjectured, however, that his words awoke little response on the part of the sitter. Wilkie himself thought this portrait the best he had done on his Eastern tour.

He left Alexandria on the 20th of May; his ship, the steamer *Oriental*, touched at Malta six days later. On that day he wrote to his sister a very cheerful letter, conveying good wishes to his friends. But it is certain that, though his words were sanguine, he was far from well; he was probably silent concerning

Sir David Wilkie

his health on account of his disinclination to awaken unnecessary alarm. The surgeon's remarks in the logbook of the *Oriental* emphasise this fact. They relate that "Sir David Wilkie came on board at Alexandria, apparently greatly impaired in health." The report, however, goes on to say that he "appeared and expressed himself as having improved in his general health on the voyage." A third statement of the surgeon as to the cause of Wilkie's illness gives the key to the serious nature of the attack. He closes by saying that the drinking of iced lemonade and the eating of fruit at Malta acted fatally upon a constitution that was never robust. The end was sudden. When

Death of Wilkie

the doctor went to the patient's cabin on the morning after the seizure, he found him incoherent; a comatose state supervened immediately, and he died about eleven o'clock in the forenoon. Wilkie's death happened off Gibraltar. The ship was going full speed ahead at the instant, and it was put back to Gibraltar that leave might be asked from the authorities to bury him there. The request was refused. A coffin was constructed on board ship; and then in the evening, just before sunset, the body of the great painter was committed to the sea. His death and burial occurred on the 1st of June 1841.

Wilkie was universally lamented. The pathos and the tragic solemnity of the circumstances of his death moved two of his brother artists, Turner and George Jones, to perpetuate the scene in paintings of memorable beauty. Haydon profoundly mourned his life-long

Haydon's Tribute

friend, and his *Autobiography* tells of the gloom and grief which clung about him. The noble tribute to Wilkie, pronounced in Haydon's lecture at the London Mechanics' Institution on the 22nd of October following, and printed as part of his fourth lecture on "Painting and Design," is a true coronal of their ripe years of intimacy. "Our friendship," he said, "began in a dispute on art—we passed life in argument, and ended it in a sarcasm; and now he is gone I feel his loss as if it would never be replaced to me, as it never can. His patience, his bearing and forbearing, his modesty, his kindness of heart in spite of his chilling manners, his hospitality, his original power of thought, his hatred of idleness, his domestic virtues added to his great and deserved fame, rendered Wilkie a friend not to be met with twice in the life of a man, and forces the imagination to dwell with fondness on the conception of again finding his spirit cleansed of its mortalities, where separation will be impossible."

The President and Council of the Royal Academy addressed a letter of condolence to Wilkie's brother and sister. They stated how sensible they were of their indebtedness to him for his valuable services as a man and an artist, and their grief and regret by reason of an event that had "deprived the arts and his country of one of their most distinguished ornaments." A graceful concluding sentence contains the opinions that "although he has been unhappily cut off in the full vigour of his powers, he has lived long enough for his

Sir David Wilkie

fame; that his works are known and admired wherever the arts are appreciated; and that he has achieved a celebrity unsurpassed in modern times." The signatories included Sir Martin Archer Shee, Landseer, and Maclise.

A meeting was held at the Thatched House Tavern, St. James's Street, London, in August, for the purpose of taking steps towards the erection of a monument to Wilkie. Sir Robert Peel presided, and *Memorials* the meeting included such men as the Duke of Sutherland, Lord John Russell, Viscount Mahon, Lord Charles Townshend, Count D'Orsay, Thomas Phillips, R.A., Charles Dickens, Sir Francis Chantrey, Allan Cunningham, William Macready, John Murray, Daniel Maclise, and others of like note. Peel spoke eloquently and with taste and sympathy on the terms of Wilkie's genius, and on his qualities as a man. The Duke of Sutherland proposed the first resolution, which testified that the genius of Sir David Wilkie was of that high order which entitled him not only to the admiration and gratitude of his country, but to be publicly regarded amongst those whom she loves to honour. The second resolution was proposed by Lord John Russell. It referred to the necessity of raising a memorial that should be a permanent and characteristic testimonial of Wilkie's worth as a man, and his eminence as a British artist. The third resolution, which urged that a statue would be the most appropriate testimonial, was proposed by Viscount Mahon, who spoke with insight upon the Spanish pictures.

Eastern Sketches

The sum of £1000 was subscribed immediately, and this was ultimately doubled. A meeting was held in the summer of 1844 to select a sculptor. The preference was given to Joseph by a majority of votes over Thomas Campbell. Joseph's statue was accepted by the Trustees of the National Gallery.

The drawings done by Wilkie on his Eastern tour may be appropriately treated as in a way a posthumous publication; for it was only when his hand could paint no more that the diligence of its application to the last was ascertained. *Eastern Sketches*

Besides the three pictures already referred to—the portraits of the Sultan and Mehemet Ali, and the graceful group entitled “The Turkish Letter-Writer”—he drew over thirty sketches, some of them of extraordinary merit. They are scattered here and there over Great Britain, most of them owned by private purchasers. In 1843 Joseph Nash published two collections of these sketches, and his volumes give an interesting idea of what the artist thus accomplished. Most of the drawings are portraits; but the more complex subjects, though few, are treated with a skill and thoroughness that perfectly make amends for their paucity. Those of a peculiarly Oriental cast bear ample proof of his practical insistence upon his plan of executing a series of pictures that would reflect with accuracy the features, form, and dress of the inhabitants of the East. That this plan was commendable, his own drawings make clear; and it has the further excellent support of Holman Hunt and other distinguished

Sir David Wilkie

painters. It is hardly fair to protest, as Sir Walter Armstrong does, that Art is not decidedly the richer for it. It is indeed true that our religious art is not greater than that of Fra Angelico, Raphael, or even Rembrandt; but this is from the imaginative greatness of these men, and not from the failure of the artistic canon laid down by Wilkie.

A section of these Oriental sketches was done at Constantinople; the rest were the result of the painter's studies at Jerusalem. One of the most remarkable of the portraits is that of Hallicoo Mirza, a Persian prince

Hallicoo whose portrait was drawn at Constantinople.
Mirza It appears twice—the better portrait is in a picture group of two persons, where the

second figure is that of a negro boy. The sketch is called "A Persian Prince, his Slave bringing him Sherbet." Wilkie intended to make use of the drawing of this prince's head as a model for a head of Christ; and it is possible that he acted upon this intention in the two pictures dedicated to scenes in the life of our Saviour. The nobility and power to be observed in the presentation of the head of Hallicoo Mirza warrant the justice of his project. As if influenced by the success attending the delineation of the principal figure, the artist's portrait of the negro child rises to a real height of excellence. Drawing and expression are alike admirable. The portrait of the little daughter of Walker Bey, who is habited in Turkish dress, is a work of captivating beauty and finish. The praise has been bestowed upon it that it is not surpassed by any similar sketches of the fore-



"Knox Dispensing the Sacrament" (p. 166).

320

Portraits of Turkish Women

most masters. Leslie speaks with enthusiasm of this picture. He observes that the masterly sketches made in those countries from which Wilkie "was not destined to return, shows how actively (too actively indeed) his fine mind had been engaged to the very last. Among them I remember one of the most fascinating representations of childhood I ever beheld—the young daughter of Admiral Walker, in an Eastern dress. It was as beautiful as anything of Reynolds or Gainsborough, and yet quite unlike either." The child's features are touched with wonderful delicacy of feeling; but the superiority of the drawing lies in the skill evinced in the treatment of the whole figure. Here it recalls the elaborate carefulness of "The First Earring"; and to say this is, in truth, to say all that need be said.

When Wilkie settled at Constantinople, he wrote to an English correspondent, expressing his admiration of the beauty of Turkish women, and his hopes of deriving abundance of what he termed "paintable" material from among the fair inhabitants round him. The charming sketches entitled "A Lady of Pera," "A Circassian Lady," and "Three Greek Sisters at Therapia," constitute the sum of the attainment at which he thus proposes to aim. "A Lady of Pera" is the portrait of the lady

"Bright as the jewel of Giamschid,"

who forms the main attraction of "The Turkish Letter-

Sir David Wilkie

Writer." "A Circassian Lady" has been impugned as too doll-like, though the criticism would be far more justly applied to others of Wilkie's portraiture of women that are less successful than this. The face has natural sweetness, and the artist's handiwork is characterised by facility and a sureness of rendering that are not always marks of his portrait-painting. Equally delicate power of workmanship distinguishes the group which has the name of "Three Greek Sisters at Therapia." These ladies were actually Greek, and not Turkish, though the sketch may be classed with his other Turkish drawings. They lived at Therapia, the fashionable suburb of Constantinople, and were friends of Mrs. Bankhead, an English lady to whom Wilkie brought an introduction. The pensive beauty of one of the profiles in this picture reflects the very tenderness of the living face. The most important of Wilkie's other Eastern drawings of women is his "Hebrew Women reading the Scriptures at Jerusalem." This is inferior to his Turkish drawings of a like kind. The figures are formally placed, while the faces lack both vigour and ease of handling.

The Turkish soldiery, servants, and subordinate officials offered a very romantic sort of material for Wilkie's brush; and few of these Eastern sketches are better than those of his drago-
Portraits of Turkish Soldiers mans and such characters. They have such individual classification as "The Travelling Tartar to the Queen's Messenger," "Sotiri, principal Albanian to the Consulate at Bucharest," "Dragoman

Portraits of Turkish Soldiers

of Mr. Wittal of Smyrna," and "A Sheikh, who accompanied Sir David Wilkie and Party to the Red Sea." The Tartar of the first-mentioned sketch is very picturesque. It was he who brought to Constantinople the news of the fall of Acre; and his portrait has a place of importance in Wilkie's larger picture called "The Turkish Courier relating the News of the Capture of Acre." "The Dragoman of Mr. Wittal of Smyrna" introduces the portrait of an Armenian. An Armenian is naturally dignified, and this grand air has been felicitously caught by the painter. He has been especially happy in depicting the countenance, which speaks of intelligence and generosity. Wilkie's attendant "Sheikh" at the Dead Sea is, like the rest of these interpretations of the rude men of the East, a figure of undoubted natural force of presentation. The sheikh is tall and gaunt, and the wild restlessness of facial expression peculiar to his race and calling is finely brought out. The accessories, too, are touched and finished with adequate skill. The "Sheikh" ranks below none of these Eastern portraits in merit.

Only two drawings did Wilkie complete on the particular themes that inspired his journey to Palestine. The names of these are "The Saviour at Emmaus," and "Sketch for the Nativity." *Sacred Subjects*
The former is distinctly marked with the new conceptions on the exposition of Scripture subjects that he had so lately pondered. The disciples are drawn in ordinary Moslem costume. The picture is painted in

Sir David Wilkie

oil, the colour being of exceeding richness. When the time taken to the sketch is considered, it is astonishing with what power the head of Christ is depicted. The features and forms of the disciples, also, are extremely faithful to the types upon which they were modelled. The "Sketch for the Nativity" is mainly deserving of praise for its accuracy of treatment. The drawing was done at Jerusalem, and each figure was studied and developed from persons chosen as most nearly approaching the artist's idea of the Scripture characters. There can be no doubt that had Wilkie lived to realise on a wide scale his idea of the painting of Scripture subjects, his innovation would itself have been epoch-making.

His remaining larger sketches done in the East were a "Group in a Café at Constantinople," "The Turkish *Courier relating the News of the Capture of Acre,*" and "A Study of Camels." The *Turkish Scenes* "Group in a Café" is a description of a quiet "conversazione" in which the chibouk and coffee are helpful factors. Variety is lent to the scene by the differences of the men's dresses. The Armenian, the Greek, the Tartar, and the Dervish conspicuously occupy the foreground. The most dramatic figure is that of a gaily-apparelled Turk, whose rich and flowing robes augment the imposing pride of his air. Of "The Turkish Courier relating the News of the Capture of Acre," it may be said that in drawing the courier is the least satisfactory of the group. The attitude is awkward, while face and hands suggest

Wilkie Prices

nothing whatever of his message. Most of the other heads, which are unmistakably from models, admit of no censure. Wilkie's "Study of Camels" is a delightful piece of work—dexterous, strong, and well-managed. It is a rarity in the list of his pictures, for, if his somewhat numerous drawings of dogs be not considered, he has seldom painted others of the lower animals—the oxen of "Pitlessie Fair" and the horse of "The Chelsea Pensioners" are the noticeable exceptions.

A final word must be said on the question of Wilkie's prices for his pictures. Mr. Brydall, in his *Art in Scotland*, dwells upon the small sums that frequently occur as the payments for these Prices paintings, most of which were almost unanimously reputed of a very high order. He ascribes the insignificant prices to the painter's innate modesty. It is assuredly a forcible testimony to the truth of this statement that a number of Wilkie's pictures changed hands in his lifetime at payments very much greater than those at which he sold them. "The Rent Day," for example, originally painted for 200 guineas, was afterwards sold for 750 guineas. For "The Card Players" he was paid only 100 guineas; its purchaser sold it for 600 guineas. Greatly increased prices were also received for pictures by Wilkie sold after his death. The figures are interesting. At the Wilkie sale in 1843, "The Village School" brought £756; it was re-bought at £1000; at a sale in 1887 it ran up to 1650 guineas. "Napoleon and the Pope" cost first of all £500; in

Sir David Wilkie

1877 its price was £1890. These facts Mr. Brydall records. Mr. Algernon Graves says that "The Rabbit on the Wall," originally sold for 200 guineas, brought, a year after Wilkie's death, £735, and in 1876, £1050. In this year, too, "Distraining for Rent," originally sold for 600 guineas, rose to £1102 10s. In 1870, "Alfred in the Neatherd's Cottage," for which its original purchaser paid 150 guineas, was bought for £756. Mr. A. H. Millar, in his invaluable narrative, *Fife, Pictorial and Historical*, quotes some interesting sales of Wilkie's pictures. In 1893, he says, "The Letter of Introduction" was sold for £2152, and "Distraining for Rent" for £2310.

CHAPTER X.

APPRECIATION.

Temporary eclipse—Personal appearance—Unselfishness—Friendship with Haydon—Partiality for Scottish talent—Haydon's Animadversions—Humour—Anecdotes by Wilkie Collins—Devotion to art—Religious sentiment—Change of style—Work in history—Early manner—Second manner—Place in art—Mr. Henley's *Views and Reviews*—Hazlitt on Hogarth and Wilkie—Originality and variety of Wilkie's genius.

AT the present day the reputation of Wilkie is not at all on a level with the fame he enjoyed for most part of the nineteenth century. The very simplicity *Temporary* of the charm which Ruskin ascribes to him *Eclipse* equally with Scott—the power to touch passions which all feel, and to express truths which all can recognise—lets the real genius in his art drop out of notice, and thus has helped to heighten the lustre of new and persuasive fashions in painting. Accordingly, notwithstanding the beauty of his work, it has of late years experienced a determinedly adverse, if not subtle criticism. The paltry gibes that Northcote threw at the distinctive work accomplished by Wilkie have not, it is true, been repeated. Yet misconstruction of a kindred sort has gathered force against it. Misconstruction is the only term that can rightfully be applied

Sir David Wilkie

to such criticism; for art criticism, like all other criticism, ought surely to be guided by an intelligent principle. When it is not thus formulated, but assumes shape from palpable prejudice and false generalisation, there must needs be hesitancy in accepting it. It is this condition of the critical mind that has to be faced in modern attacks upon Wilkie's work as a painter. Nor has antagonism to his art been content to rest there. The character of the man, essentially frank, unaffected, dignified, has not escaped hostile shafts. Yet, fairly considered, his manliness of thought, and his whole-hearted devotedness to art for art's sake—to note only these qualities—have a distinction that makes them worthy of any age of culture.

Of attractive personal appearance, Wilkie had no professional air. Mrs. Thomson tells that when she was introduced to him, she could have hazarded no guess as to his occupation. He was tall and well-proportioned, but slightly built. Before the assaults of illness weakened him, there is frequent reference to his sprightly demeanour. His features were thoughtful, and were effectively lightened up by passing emotion. There are two good portraits of him drawn by himself. The one, painted when he was at the age of nineteen, hangs in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh; the other, which represents him at the age of twenty-nine, is in the National Portrait Gallery, London. The portrait by Sir William Beechey, done not long after Wilkie went to London,

Unselfishness

assigns to him a look of rude hilarity that does not appear natural ; that by Phillips, which depicts him in his later years, is said to be an accurate likeness. His bust by Joseph is in the Scottish National Gallery ; the statue by the same sculptor is in the hall of the National Gallery, London. A bust by Chantrey, Helen Wilkie dedicated to his memory in Cults Parish Church by the side of those of the artist's father and mother.

Ordinary tokens of family affection may scarcely be acclaimed as a special sign of unselfishness ; but family affection on Wilkie's part was of a very *Unselfish-* gracious kind. The whole history of his *ness* career in London before he became famous speaks of the scrupulous regard he exhibited towards his relatives and his friends. While his hopes beat strong for his success as an artist, he did not lessen his affectionate concern for the home-circle of Cults. His father, his mother, his sister continually abode in his thoughts, and from time to time thrilled a chord of reminiscence. The death of his brother James brought upon him heavy financial loss ; he suffered similarly through the speculations of his youngest brother. But to acquaintances he was no less a ready helper. Despite unwarranted reproach, and amid a great deal of personal annoyance, he struggled courageously, both with advice and with money, to diminish the vast necessities of Haydon. Haydon, honest man that he was, acknowledged this admirable trait of Wilkie. In his diary for 1829, written shortly after Wilkie's return from Italy, he discusses the incidents of his second

Sir David Wilkie

arrest for debt, on which occasion Wilkie was his bail. Concluding a morose comment on his old friend's rebuking him for his foolish blunders in business affairs, he, nevertheless, remarks:—"Master David, I think I scent the old human nature. But with all thy faults I like thee still, and can nowhere find thy equal." This quality of unselfishness in other less intimate relationships, as those with Collins, Jackson, Raimbach, Uwins, and others of his associates (especially it may be conceded those of Scottish extraction), may be adduced as witnesses of his generous kindliness of disposition. Episodes of a truly humorous sort are told to illustrate

it. Wilkie was much twitted by his English friends with his inveterate partiality for
A Canny Scot

Scottish talent. Mr. W. P. Frith, R.A., in his *Autobiography* relates an entertaining story about this accusation. A Scottish artist who was a friend of Wilkie's had long vainly sought to inscribe his name on the bead-roll of the Royal Academy. On a hanging day, when Wilkie was a member of the hanging committee, he was seen wandering from room to room with a small picture, and ineffectually striving to fit it into a good place.

"Why, Wilkie," said a colleague, "what makes you take so much trouble with that picture of Green's?"

"Green!" exclaimed Wilkie, "I thought it was Macdonald's,¹" and he hurriedly left the picture to its fate.

Mr. Frederick Goodall, R.A., in his *Reminiscences*

¹ Mr. Frith does not print the full name, but it is very likely that Thomas Macdonald is referred to.

Haydon's Animadversions

supplies another excellent anecdote on this head. When, one day, Wilkie's fellow-officials of the hanging committee returned from luncheon, where he had not joined them, they were so taken aback by the array of Scottish pictures which in the interval he had placed on the walls that the exclamation was wittily made, "Surely, we have all Scotland Yard here!" Burnet, in his *Progress of a Painter in the Nineteenth Century*, illustrates Wilkie's consideration for youthful genius.

Haydon, when the sharp spirit of jealousy raged within him, chose to animadvert on what he believed to be Wilkie's undue spirit of caution. It may be safely concluded that this existed only as a strongly-felt contrast to his censor's impulsiveness. The caution thus condemned, at any rate, came invariably into play when Haydon was waging his fiery and reckless conflict with the Royal Academicians. It made its most visible appearance at the time of the uncompromising *Examiner* correspondence. Wilkie cannot be blamed for the exercise of everyday discretion. It is not evident that it was his custom to do more than this. He was, moreover, certainly free from a time-serving spirit, a blot of temperament which his detractors, contemporary and present-day, impute to him.

Socially, he exhibited courtesy but not obtrusiveness. So reserved was his demeanour in society that he was sometimes thought to be naturally haughty. Esteemed as he was by people of influence, he did not overstrain the expression of gratitude to them. "The delicacy,"

Sir David Wilkie

said Collins, "with which he always abstained from boasting of the notice shown him by the nobility was very remarkable. He was especially careful *Reserved* never to mention any engagement he might have to dine with great people; but if his engagement was with a humble friend, the name was always ready, unless, indeed, he had reason to think you were not of the party." Wilkie's tact achieved no ambition for him that was not firmly strengthened by sheer ability and hard work. Occasionally, indeed, his individuality of outlook was inimical to his professional interests. The matter hardly calls for notice; but Haydon's at times distorted judgment has here not been innocent of harm, and the allusion is defensible.

An artist whose best work dealt with humorous themes is bound to have displayed not a few examples of his own possession of humour in ordinary life. *Humour* Yet comparatively little humour distinguishes the correspondence and *Journal* of Wilkie. His writings, on the contrary, have a serious cast of reflection. To this there are a few exceptions. Cunningham quotes a brief set of farcical stories that were narrated to Wilkie, and supplements them with the information that the hearer laughed "till his eyes ran over." Wilkie Collins, too, says that his father's drollery never lacked the hearty approval of his old friend, and that a rich store "of good jokes and clever retorts" was thus harmoniously struck. The writer, however, thinks that humour rather than wit was the

Wilkie's Lack of Wit

note of Wilkie's intellectual gifts. As proof of this he brings up divers anecdotes. The following he culls from a manuscript of his father's:—

“I recollect once, when we were staying at Mr. Wells's, Redleaf, one morning at breakfast a very small puppy was running about under the table. ‘Dear me!’ said a lady, ‘how this creature teases me!’ I took it up, and put it into my breast-pocket. Mr. Wells said, ‘That is a pretty nose-gay.’ ‘Yes,’ said I, ‘it is a *dog-rose*.’ Wilkie's attention, sitting opposite, was called to his friend's pun: but all in vain—he could not be persuaded to see anything in it. I recollect once trying to explain to him with the same want of success, Hogarth's joke in putting the sign of the woman without a head (‘The Good Woman’) under the window from whence the quarrelsome wife is throwing the dinner into the street.”

A further amusing instance of Wilkie's inability to comprehend wit is furnished by the elder Collins. It sets forth how his brother Francis, who was gifted with a very retentive memory, hoodwinked Wilkie by a clever piece of imposture. Having learned by rote a complete number of Johnson's *Rambler*, he proceeded to try it as a conversational interlude at Wilkie's house. The company was composed of the two conspirators and their intended victim. William Collins led up to the coming excursus by turning the drift of the talk to the topic of the *Rambler* article. Thereupon, getting his cue, Francis Collins began to declaim the Johnsonian periods. The host judged that all was not

Sir David Wilkie

right; but, on looking to the third member of the company for an explanation, he saw him paying solemn heed to the rhythmical eloquence of his brother. The trick was sustained to its close, Wilkie, after the tirade was ended, merely remarking that, albeit his friend's theory was ably argued, he did not pretend to follow it quite precisely. This curious touch of obliviousness is readily associated with the oft-repeated story that is told at his expense. The story describes an alleged interview that took place between Wilkie and a brother artist. The authorities differ as to who the second artist was: both Chantrey and Newton are credited with acting as interlocutor. Lockhart thinks it was Newton. As Lockhart's version is the more excellent, it is here cited:—

“*Newton*. Well, we have had a pleasant evening, Wilkie.

Wilkie. Raily?

Newton. But you were very silent.

Wilkie. Raily?

Newton. In fact, you said but one word.

Wilkie. Raily?

Newton. There it goes again! Why, Dawvid, you never do say anything but *raily*.

Wilkie. Raily!”

Devotion to his art forms a very striking trait of Wilkie's character. From youth to age the love of painting overwhelmingly absorbed him, and enticed him with always fresh elements of fascination. “Wilkie's studio,” writes an acquaintance of his later

Devotion to Art

years, "was his wife, his friend, his all; his pencils were his children; Rembrandt his Jupiter; Watteau his Juno; Teniers his household deity." Again and again the records of his probationary days in London dwell upon his insistence on the necessity of hard endeavour. His patient drawing from his own hands and limbs inasmuch as he was without a living model; his hours of faithful study beside the Elgin Marbles; his laborious experiments with puppets in a doll's house for the purpose of testing the different shades of daylight, all witness to the complete consecration that stamped the aim of his life. This intensity of effort scrupulously influenced his very workmanship. Sir George Beaumont once saw him so wrapped up in the manipulation of a picture that he scarcely seemed to breathe. No poet more devoutly expressed the inspiration of his heart in verse than did Wilkie in his pictorial design.

His personal qualities cannot be fittingly summed up without giving regard to his religious sentiment. His humour, indeed, from its spiritual thoughtfulness, suggests that of Addison or of his own friend Washington Irving. The humour of all three, of a wonderfully delicate texture, was due to a quick perception of the graver facts of life. The sunny temper and invincible suavity of Sir Roger, Will Wimble, and Squire Bracebridge have their counterparts in essence, if not in exact dramatic parallel, in the creations of Wilkie. The source of such winning sweetness in the imaginative conceptions of these men

*Devotion
to Art*

*Religious
Sentiment*

Sir David Wilkie

of genius was their religious bias. Their minds ranging the varied paths of the world's ways of thinking, always returned to the citadel of confidence in the fundamental integrity of the universal human heart and the beneficence of the Power that ruled human affairs. All three men supremely manifest the concord of fine natures with the joyousness that, after all, dominates a world of order and beauty.

The religion from which blossomed Wilkie's life-thought possessed chiefly simplicity and breadth. At its root it was a manly faith, without a trace of mawkishness. Altogether, it was not the kind of creed that would have suffered radical change from the sceptical arguments which have powerfully disturbed the religious world since his day. It was bound up intrinsically with "the things that cannot be shaken"; and it is thus that the serenity and the brightness of his artistic imaginings must be of permanent appeal. In Scotland, of late years, the personality of John Knox has been touched with a light breath of unpopularity; but this estimate of Knox was far removed from that of Wilkie. His sympathy eagerly responded to the ardent spirit of Puritanism that for centuries has enshrined the Scottish reformer in the annals of heroism. It was with a like genuine zeal of religious enthusiasm that he set out for Palestine. In every expression of his religious thought he was quite consistent. We may or may not in these days of less stringent religious observance look with patience upon his formality in this respect. Yet there can be no minimising its sincerity. On this understand-

Religious Sentiment

ing, it is worth remembering that Wilkie never painted on a Sunday, but went regularly to church. His favourite preacher was Sydney Smith, and it may be learned from the pages of his *Journal* how thoroughly he liked the prelections of that preacher. Similar interesting facts are not uncommon throughout the story of his life. Wolcot horrified him with a crude advocacy of freethought. When Collins went to bid him good-bye before his departure for Palestine, he pointed with perfect candour to a copy of the Bible, which, he said, was to be his guide-book during his travels. As he sailed down the Danube a muezzin's cry to prayer summoned up the pensive reflection that he was now for many days beyond "the sound of the church-going bell." This strong religious feeling of the man is notable as related to his bright philosophy of life. It demands the fuller acknowledgment when it is called to mind how heavily he was burdened with physical distress for almost the half of his professional career. That dreadful sense of "wearing an iron crown" laid hold of him in 1825; and yet the buoyancy and nobility of his achievement did not falter. The reality of his deeper convictions, it may be presumed, bore him onwards; he triumphantly wrought with a confidence resembling that postulated by Browning :—

"Thanks to Him
Who never is dishonoured in the spark
He gave us from the fire of fires, and bade
Remember whence it sprang, nor be afraid
While that burns on, though all the rest be dark."

Sir David Wilkie

To turn to Wilkie as an artist. The vexed question of his change of style has been already mentioned.

Change of Style Plainly, more than one reason influenced him to exchange *genre* for historical painting.

There can be no denying—he himself admitted it—that one of the reasons was purely practical. He believed that he could work more rapidly and more easily on the larger and broader methods of design peculiar to the Italian and Spanish schools. Cunningham lays emphasis on the artist's statement of his views upon this subject. "Wilkie," he says, "had made up his mind in the matter; he felt that if he continued to work in his usual laborious style of detail and finish, he would never achieve independence, nor add another sprig of laurel to his wreath; so he resolved on fresh fields and pastures new, in spite of the warnings of friends, and the admonitions of critics."

It is possible, also, that he was actuated by new interest in a phase of life different from that which his pencil had of old delighted to portray. The time soon came—and it manifested itself more emphatically to him than it does to many—when human surroundings

"Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality."

A more didactic purpose than that which concerns itself with the familiar side of life asserted its claim upon him; and he sought to disburden his new message with the best skill he could command. Possibly, a serener air would have been round his work of a later

Historical Method

date. The Eastern pictures, in fact, as far as their material imports, were still a third phase of his outlook upon the world. But this intermediate stage was pre-eminently reflective. The grandeur of the ancient faith of the churches, the lofty spirit of religious unrest that had so profoundly stirred Scotland, the storm and stress of the Napoleonic *régime*, all these things at this point of his career appealed to him with appositeness and power.

The adoption of the historical method of painting logically followed from the two primary influences that may be plausibly surmised to have led him to his marked change of style. But the choice of the historical method, too, had a deliberate motive. Had Wilkie simply wished to abandon his peculiar manner of painting for a manner at once more facile and more lucrative, he would naturally have directed his attention exclusively to portrait-painting. But historical painting was both more intellectual and more fraught with opportunity for the exercise of worthy craftsmanship. In the case of a painter so jealous as Wilkie was of the dignity of his art, it must assuredly be expected that some valid plea should be given in support of the step now taken. He laid weight on the intellectual and informative part of historical painting, on which he has these words in his *Remarks on Painting*:—"To create a want which art is to supply, it is first necessary to consider this, that art is never encouraged to a great extent for the love of art, but for some acceptable service, of utility or gratification, which art has the means of fur-

Sir David Wilkie

nishing to the community or to individuals. But if art is once employed for some ostensible object, to give the semblance of individual character, to record some great event, or to decorate with appropriate subject a public or a private dwelling, it is then for the artist to super-add, by his own genius, all the grace and interest his imagination can bestow to render the work useful, which is the true end of art." This, it is true, does not breathe of the "diviner air" of "The Blind Fiddler" and its painter's kindred works; but it is the utterance of a man with an abidingly genuine artistic ideal.

On the technical side of historical painting in Wilkie's day, there was ample room for a clear-sighted genius like his to act. Of the nobility of motive that pervades all good historical painting, the Church had lately shown its forgetfulness. Reynolds, West, Barry, and others had offered to decorate St. Paul's with works of art; but the Bishop of London curtly refused to allow the doors of the metropolitan church to be opened for the inauguration of Popery in it. Not only was there this ignorance outside the circle of practitioners of painting: within that circle existed false and illiterate views of the requirements of art. Barry, who was the ablest of the English historical painters at the dawn of the nineteenth century, drew pictures marred by strange absurdities. A flagrant example of these was his introduction of William Penn, in the dress of a Quaker, on the plains of Elysium. Wilkie sought to remedy such errors, and acted a vigorous part in establishing a proper

Historical Method

idea of the essentials of historical painting. All his historical paintings are accurate representations—accurate with regard to the facts of the era and the scene they describe. A critic, however, deploring the unpicturesque fashion of modern dress, has lightly maintained that had Napoleon worn any species of the modern hat, Wilkie would not have put it on his head.

As was pointed out in speaking of Wilkie's Italian and Spanish tours, the style of his historical paintings was frankly imitative. For such brilliant imitations there is assuredly a plea in Art. Wilkie was convinced that his work of this kind was of creditable stamp, and he threw both labour and skill into its performance. Yet it is certain he was also convinced that this was not the sort of achievement he was best fitted to do. His dislike for the commission that ended in his "Alfred in the Neatherd's Cottage" and "The Death of Sir Philip Sidney" supports this conclusion. But a series of events—his money difficulties, his health, the trend of his thought, his studies—united to attract him to this new path. He set his mind with manfulness to accomplish what he was thus so strenuously prompted to do. Nor did he mistake his capacity. It is not a trivial boast that his historical paintings have a place with the best works of the kind by British artists, and that it may be said (as Burnet did) that his "John Knox" and "Columbus" would do honour to any country. None of them was an original feat, as was his "Pitlessie Fair," or his "Village Festival," or his

Sir David Wilkie

"Chelsea Pensioners"; they were manifest and unhesitating imitations of the creative masters of historical art. But his attempt had the reward of success. His historical paintings are a lasting testimony to his rare artistic penetration and his marvellous dexterity as a craftsman.

Change of style did not occur but once in Wilkie's career. The transference from *genre* to historical painting was preceded by a minor revolution of method within the sphere of *genre*. The *Early Manner* artist's first pictorial manner, the manner of "Pitlessie Fair," of "The Village Politicians," and of "The Village Festival," gave way to the richer manner of "The Blind Fiddler," and of "Blind Man's Buff." His first manner was certainly his own, inspired by no direct study of the Dutch masters, though it and its class have an unmistakable affinity to the work of Teniers. Nor, in truth, is it quite clear how much of Ostade's style entered into the technique of "The Blind Fiddler." He painted "The Blind Fiddler," it is said, with a Teniers lent him by Sir George Beaumont as a source of inspiration. Still, Ostade he admired, and Ostade's influence, though not of an excessive character, is to be traced upon the second phase of his works. Burnet's evidence as to this is conclusive. He says that Wilkie in the intermediate part of his career seldom got an early picture into his hands without endeavouring to increase its effect by richness and fulness of tone. The truth of Burnet's assertion will be accepted, but with a touch of

Wilkie's Place

regret. This is an illustration of his averment as to Wilkie's bias towards Ostade:—"I remember seeing one lately, the small picture of 'The Jew's Harp,' now in the possession of Colonel Wells, of Redleaf. Wilkie and the late William Collins being on a visit at Redleaf, Wilkie got this small work on his easel, and went entirely over it with rich vehicle and glazing; the consequence was, that the delicate touching, sharpness, and silvery tones were swallowed up in a flood of megilp. As I had engraved it in its former state, I could scarcely recognise it as the original, and asked Mr. Wells's permission to take it to the window to ascertain the fact."

What is Wilkie's place on the roll of British art? Criticism of his work is far from uniform. Waagen, Silvestre, and Sir Walter Armstrong accord him unstinted praise, especially as a painter *His Place of genre*; Mr. Henley, faintly echoed by a contingent of minor authorities, leaves him hardly a particle of merit. Waagen's opinion, as eloquently enunciating the favourable view of Wilkie's art, may be first instanced. He finds in Wilkie "a close affinity with his celebrated countryman Sir Walter Scott. Both have in common that genuine, refined delineation of character which extends to the minutest particulars. In the soul of both there is more love than contempt for man; both afford us the most soothing views of the quiet, genial happiness which is sometimes found in the narrow circle of domestic life, understanding with masterly skill, by

Dr.

Waagen

Sir David Wilkie

delicate traits of good-natured humour, to heighten the charms of such scenes. Also, as true poets, whether in language or colour, must do, they show us man in his manifold weaknesses, errors, afflictions, and distresses. . . . We duly prize another feature of his pictures—namely, their genuine national character. They are in all their parts the most spirited, animated, and faithful representations of the peculiarities and modes of life of the English. In many other respects Wilkie reminds me of the great Dutch painters of common life of the seventeenth century: for instance, in the choice of many of his subjects, and particularly by the careful and complete carrying out of the details in his earlier pictures, in which he is one of the rare exceptions among his countrymen. If he does not go so far in this respect as Gerard Douw and Mieris, he is nearly on an equality with the more carefully executed paintings of Teniers and Jan Steen. His touch, too, often approaches the former in spirit and freedom."

There is much wisdom in all this; and Mr. Henley's counterblast is rather a feeble breath against it.

Mr. He sounds it in the second volume of
Henley Views and Reviews. This book contains a paragraph of less than three hundred words on Wilkie's art, a pronouncement which is as full of positive error as it can possibly be. The writer starts by describing Wilkie as "a pictorial Galt." Wilkie survives only, it is affirmed, in the replicas of the engraver. He has the talent of a man of letters who has indiscreetly deviated into paint. Paint, as

Wilkie and Galt

Velasquez knew it, was unknown to him till it was too late. The crumb of comfort is that he tried his best.

Wilkie must be conceded a much higher position in painting than that occupied in literature by Galt, a writer whose modest and creditable performance has of late years undergone a good deal of strain through the glory of his having founded a popular literary school. The dictum of this passage is a false appraisal. If Wilkie, in the sum of his achievement, is to be compared with any one in literature, it is in Burns or in Scott that his peer must be found. Galt never approaches him. The author of *The Annals of the Parish* interpreted what he saw with fidelity; and he laboured to do so with persistent care, almost in the sweat of his brow. But his vision was both limited and without concentration, his workmanship somewhat meagre. He had none of Wilkie's breadth, vivacity, freedom of handling. Galt's dramatic method can only be called a sedulous if pleasing impressionism; Wilkie has the compass and alternation of life itself.

To say, again, that the painter of "Pitlessie Fair," of "The Village Festival," and of "The Penny Wedding" and "Blind Man's Buff," survives simply in reproductions would lead us to doubt whether such a contention is to be looked upon as a piece of serious criticism. Briefly defined, Mr. Henley's criterion of painting is one that admits of no consideration for those whom he condemns as "anecdotists in form"; and thus the works of Wilkie, along with all paintings of this description, incur his reproach. All the examples of so-called

Sir David Wilkie

"painted story," good or bad, are by this critic "in one red ruin blent." Sheer injustice is the mark of this decision. To put the weak dramatising, the stiffness of drawing, the poverty of colour of the majority of Wilkie's successors in any deliberate comparison with the liveliness and flexibility of his technique is to stray beyond the pale of exact thinking.

One further point of Mr. Henley's censure must suffice. He speaks of Wilkie as a man of letters somehow mixed up with painting. Wilkie, it may be admitted, had genius enough to express himself with precision and even eloquence as a writer. But no artist had ever less of a bookish fancy than he. As far as his correspondence and *Journal* show, his reading was virtually restricted to Scott's novels. Once he alludes to Joanna Baillie's plays with a bated admiration. Scott, Wordsworth, and Coleridge were his friends; but it was no literary sympathy that brought them together. Wordsworth discerned Wilkie's lack of the literary spirit. In a letter to Sir George Beaumont he excused its absence from Wilkie's paintings with the defence that his "style of painting does not require that the mind should be fed from books," but holding that he did not "think it possible to excel in landscape without a strong tincture of the poetic spirit."

The unavoidable comparison between Wilkie and Hogarth was excellently stated by Hazlitt, though at the time he did so he had before him all the master-pieces of Hogarth, and only the first six or eight of Wilkie's pictures. His purpose was to expound the

Hogarth and Wilkie

subject-matter of each of these artists. If to produce the applause of laughter be accepted as a standard from which to judge, then Hazlitt's award of the palm to Hogarth will not be questioned. *Hazlitt*

Yet something may be said for a different standard. Brilliant and searching as was the satire of Hogarth, there is an insight admirably true, wise, and profound in the delineations of the Scottish painter. The breadth of Wilkie's vision, too, again commends him. He contemplates the whole round of nature; Hogarth has a seeing eye for merely one aspect of nature. Furthermore, the reality of Wilkie's pictures, upon the excellence of which Hazlitt judiciously insists, may be set against the immense cleverness of those of Hogarth. On the score of workmanship, there is little to choose between the two painters. Yet no concession falls to be made to Hogarth. Sound and careful limner though he was, he was not master of the rich effects that were at the command of his greatest rival.

To Wilkie belongs of right the chief place in the ranks of British *genre* painters; and in most respects he holds his own in this line with any painter in the world. Painters of *genre* not a few *Of Right* have succeeded him; but the intellectual comprehension and the technical skill they have shown have too rarely been worthy of their leader. If his historical paintings and his efforts in portraiture do not merit the esteem that must be paid to his *genre* work, they are ingenious and, in some cases, noble experiments. Not least remarkable is this feature of Wilkie's achieve-

Sir David Wilkie

ment, that it is the sincere self-revelation of an amiable and lofty spirit, whom one of many warm friends probably did not err in calling "the most original, and vigorous, and varied of British painters." This, at all events, is sure, that he possessed with every exactness the artist's fairy gifts of Macaulay's lyric—

"The sense of beauty, and the love of truth."

Appendices.

- I. WILKIE PICTURES IN PUBLIC GALLERIES.
- II. WILKIE PICTURES NAMED IN THIS BOOK.
- III. WILKIE'S ETCHINGS.
- IV. BIBLIOGRAPHY.

I.

Wilkie Pictures in Public Galleries.

THE NATIONAL GALLERY.

The Blind Fiddler [No. 99].
The Village Festival [No. 122].
The Bagpiper [No. 329].

VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM.

The Peep o' Day Boy [No. 93].
Sketches and Studies for "The Refusal" [Nos. 120-124].
Reapers [No. 195].
Sketch of a Book-case for "The Letter of Introduction" [No. 227].¹
Sketches [No. 420].
A Head and Hands [No. 229].
Daughters of Sir Walter Scott [No. 230].
Sketch of Head for "The Rabbit on the Wall" [No. 231].
Landscape—a small Sketch of a party of Gipsies with two donkeys and a dog [No. 232].¹
Sir Robert Peel reading to the Queen [Nos. 1847 and 1869].
Reading a Will [Nos. 631 and 1870].
Sketches of "Finding the Body of Tippoo Sahib" [Nos. 50 and 1873].
An Eastern Physician [Nos. 53 and 1873].
The Child in "The Peep o' Day Boy" [Nos. 54 and 1873].
Two Studies of a Female Head, and small Study of a Woman [No. 926].

¹ Nos. 227-232 are lent out to Galleries in the Provinces.

Sir David Wilkie

Four Sketches for George IV. in the Holyrood Picture [Nos. 927-930].

Five Sketches for "The School" [Nos. 931-935].

Figures at the Horse Guards [No. 936].

A Woman and a Bandit [No. 937].

Figures in the "Chelsea Pensioners" [No. 938].

An Old Man [No. 929].

An Old Man seated, holding a drinking-cup [No. 940].

An Interior [No. 941].

A Groom with a Horse [No. 942].

A Figure in "The First Ear-ring" [No. 943].

A Rustic Woman [No. 944].

TATE GALLERY.

Portrait of Thomas Daniell, R.A. [No. 231].

The Parish Beadle [No. 241].

The First Ear-ring [No. 328].

A Woody Landscape [No. 330].

The Newsmongers [No. 331].

The Preaching of Knox before the Lords of the Congregation,
10th June 1559 [No. 894].

Sketch of "Blind Man's Buff" [No. 921].

A Sketch of Rustic Figures [No. 1187].

Portrait of Mrs. Elizabeth Young in Eastern Costume [No.
1727].

A Cottage Fireside at Puckaster [No. 1739].

Portrait of Miss Julia E. Gordon [No. 1740].

Six Sketches, in one frame, executed in pen, pencil, and water
colour [No. 1741].

THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY.

Sir David Wilkie, R.A. [No. 53].

Abraham Raimbach [No. 775].

THE WALLACE COLLECTION.

A Cottage Toilet Scene from *The Gentle Shepherd* [No. 352].

A Sportsman Refreshing, or The Sportsman [No. 357].

Appendix I.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF SCOTLAND.

The Gentle Shepherd [No. 149].
Mrs. Hunter (Helen Wilkie) [No. 166].
John Knox dispensing the Sacrament at Calder House [No. 175].
The Abbotsford Family [No. 195].
Sketch for "Blind Man's Buff" [No. 264].
Sketch of a Confessional [No. 318].
Lady and her Daughter, in Foreign Costume [No. 358].
Kilmartin Sacrament [No. 370].

SCOTTISH NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY.

Sir D. Wilkie and his Mother [No. 41*].
Portrait of Sir David Wilkie, by Sir William Beechey, R.A.
[No. 51].
Sir David Wilkie (2 portraits), painted by himself.

CORPORATION GALLERY, GLASGOW.

Portrait of Her Majesty Queen Victoria.
Turkish Mother and Child.
Portrait of a Lady.

CORPORATION PICTURE GALLERY, DUNDEE.

Sketch for "The Village Politicians."
Sketch for "The Rabbit on the Wall."
Sketch for "Guess my Name."
Sketch for "Nelson Sealing Despatches off Copenhagen."

Sir David Wilkie

II.

Wilkie Pictures named in this Book.

R.A. = Royal Academy; B.I. = British Institution; N.E. = Not Exhibited or Not Engraved, according to the column. An asterisk at the name of a picture signifies that the picture was exhibited by Wilkie in his private Exhibition at 87 Pall Mall. Wilkie's most important pictures were engraved in his life-time by Burnet, Rainbach, and others. Engravings of his less notable pictures, made by later artists, are fairly well represented in the British Museum portfolios. In the subjoined list these have been supplemented from "The Wilkie Gallery."

TITLE.	YEAR.	WHERE EXHIBITED.	ENGRAVER.	SEE PAGE
*Pitlessie Fair	1805	N.E.	N.E.	31
*The Village Recruit	"	"	C. Fox	34
*The Village Politicians	1806	R.A.	A. Rainbach	41
*Sunday Morning	"	N.E.	N.E.	46
*The Blind Fiddler	"	R.A.	J. Burnet	48
*Alfred in the Neatherd's Cottage	1807	N.E.	J. Mitchell	46
The Clubbists	"	"	A. Smith	53
*The New Coat	"	"	W. Greatbach	53
*The Rent Day	"	"	A. Rainbach	51
*Portrait of Lady Mary Fitzgerald	"	N.E.	N.E.	53
*The Card Players	1808	R.A.	C. G. Lewis	51
*The Gipsy Mother	"	N.E.	E. Portbury	57
*The Sick Lady	1809	"	F. Engleheart	53

Appendix II.

Portrait of the Marchioness of Lans-				
downe	1809	N.E.	N.E.	53
*The Jew's Harp	"	"	J. Burnet	53
*The Cut Finger	"	R.A.	A. Raimbach	53
*Family of Thomas Neave, Esq.	1810	N.E.	N.E.	58
*The Wardrobe Ransacked	"	"	W. Greatbach	58
*The Gamekeeper	"	R.A.	N.E.	62
The Rat Hunters	1811	"	J. C. Armytage	63
*The Village Festival	"	"	E. Smith	55
Blind Man's Buff	1813	"	A. Raimbach	65
*(Sketch)				
The Bagpiper	"	B.I.	A. Fox	66
The Letter of Introduction	1814	N.E.	J. Burnet	66
Duncan Gray	"	"	F. Engleheart	67
The Pedlar	1815	B.I.	J. Stewart	67
Distraining for Rent	"	"	A. Raimbach	70
Portrait of the Hon. H. Phipps	1816	N.E.	N.E.	72
The Rabbit on the Wall	1817	"	J. Burnet	72
Sheepwashing	"	B.I.	W. Finden	75
The Broken China Jar	"	N.E.	C. Warren	75
The Breakfast	"	"	W. Greatbach	74
Study of Bathsheba	"	"	N.E.	75
The Errand Boy	1818	R.A.	C. Boyer	79
The Abbottsford Family	"	"	R. Graves	77
The Death of Sir Philip Sidney	1819	"	A. Raimbach	79
The China Menders	"	B.I.	N.E.	82
The Whisky Still of Lochgilphead	"	N.E.	"	82
The Penny Wedding	"	R.A.	J. Stewart	79
The Reading of a Will	1820	"	J. Burnet	83
Nymphs gathering Grapes	"	B.I.	N.E.	82
The Newsmongers	1821	R.A.	W. Taylor	88

Sir David Wilkie

TITLE.	YEAR.	WHERE EXHIBITED.	ENGRAVER.	SEE PAGE
Guess my Name	1821	R.A.	E. Smith	88
Chelsea Pensioners reading the Gazette of the Battle of Waterloo	1822	"	J. Burnet	87
A Woody Landscape	"	N.E.	N.E.	75
The Parish Beadle	1823	R.A.	A. Raimbach	83
Portrait of the Duke of York	"	"	N.E.	98
The School	"	"	"	89
The Cottage Toilet	1824	R.A.	J. Stewart	99
The Smugglers	"	"	N.E.	99
The Highland Family	1825	"	G. A. Periam	100
The Confessional	1827	"	T. W. Knight	122
The Pifferari playing Hymns to the Madonna	"	"	J. C. Armytage	122
A Roman Princess washing the Pilgrims' Feet	"	"	W. Greatbach	123
The Spanish Posada, or Guerilla Council of War	"	"	J. C. Armytage	128
The Guerilla taking leave of his Confessor	"	"	G. A. Periam	128
The Maid of Saragossa	"	"	S. Cousins	128
Cardinals, Priests, and Roman Citizens washing the Pilgrims' Feet	1829	"	N.E.	122
Portrait of the Earl of Kellie	"	"	"	99
His Majesty George IV. received by the Nobles and People of Scotland	1830	"	W. Greatbach	141
The Guerilla's Return to his Family	"	"	J. C. Armytage	131

Appendix II.

Portrait of Lady Lyndhurst	1831	R.A.	N.E.	142
Portrait of Lord Melville	"	"	"	142
Portrait of George IV.	"	"	"	141
The Preaching of Knox before the Lords of the Congregation	1832	"	G. T. Doo	145
Portrait of William IV.	"	"	N.E.	143
Two Spanish Monks at Toledo	1833	"	T. W. Knight	148
Portrait of William IV.	"	"	N.E.	148
Portrait of the Duke of Sussex	"	"	"	149
Portrait of the Duke of Wellington	"	"	"	149
Not at Home	"	"	"	149
Portrait of Queen Adelaide	"	"	"	148
The Spanish Mother	"	"	A. Raimbach	149
Portrait of Sir John Leslie	"	"	N.E.	150
The First Ear-ring	1835	"	F. Engleheart	153
Portrait of the Rev. Edward Irving	"	"	N.E.	152
Portrait of the Duke of Wellington	"	"	"	152
Portrait of Sir James MacGrigor	"	"	"	152
Christopher Columbus in the Convent at La Rabida	"	"	H. T. Ryall	151
Portrait of William Esdaile, Esq.	1836	"	"	156
Portrait of Lord Montagu	"	"	N.E.	156
The Peep o' Day Boy	"	"	C. W. Sharpe	155
The Duke of Wellington writing a Despatch	"	"	"	155
Napoleon and the Pope	"	"	W. Greatbach	156
Mary, Queen of Scots, escaping from Lochleven Castle	"	"	J. H. Robinson	157
The Cotter's Saturday Night	1837	"	N.E.	163
Portrait of Thomas Wilkie	"	"	"	163
Portrait of the Earl of Tankerville	"	"	"	163

Sir David Wilkie

TITLE.	YEAR.	WHERE EXHIBITED.	ENGRAVER.	SEE PAGE
The Empress Josephine and the Sorceress	1838	R.A.	N.E.	163
Portrait of Daniel O'Connell	"	"	"	165
The Bride's Toilet	"	"	"	165
Sir David Baird discovering the Body of Tippoo Sahib	"	"	J. Burnet	159
Queen Victoria's First Council	"	"	C. Fox	164
John Knox dispensing the Sacrament	1839	N.E.	J. T. Smith	166
The Irish Whisky Still	1840	R.A.	N.E.	167
Portrait of Queen Victoria	"	"	"	167
Portrait of Lord Arbutnot	"	"	"	167
Benvenuto Cellini and the Pope	"	"	J. C. Armytage	167
Portrait of Mrs. Ferguson of Raith	"	"	N.E.	167
A Persian Prince, his Slave bringing him Sherbet	"	"	"	167
Portrait of the Daughter of Admiral Walker	1841	N.E.	H. Robinson	184
The Turkish Courier relating the News of the Capture of Acre	"	"	T. W. Hunt	184
The Turkish Letter-Writer	"	"	W. Greatbach	187
Three Greek Sisters at Therapia	"	"	R. Staines	171
A Study of Camels	"	"	W. J. Edwards	186
A Circassian Lady	"	"	C. Cousen	189
A Lady of Pera	"	"	H. Robinson	185
Hebrew Women reading the Scriptures at Jerusalem	"	"	N.E.	185
The Saviour at Emmaus	"	"	I. Thomson	186
Sketch for the Nativity	"	"	N.E.	187
An Arab Sheikh	"	"	W. J. Edwards	187

III.

Wilkie's Etchings.

WILKIE did first-rate work as an etcher, and, though his etchings are few, good judges have greatly esteemed them. Mr. P. G. Hamerton speaks of two of these etchings as equal to the best work of the old masters. The plates thus eulogised are respectively "The Pope examining a Censer" and the "Gentleman at his Desk." Commenting upon the workmanship of the first-mentioned plate, Mr. Hamerton says that the draughtsmanship is of that happy kind which, having full precision, allows itself perfect freedom. The work in this etching he thinks so fine that he ventures the conclusion that had it been the only production of the artist, it might have been assumed to be the attainment of the long labours of his prime. He adverts to the firm drawing of the Pope's face and fingers, and the true and graceful festooning of the rapid lines which indicate the censer chains.

Hardly less significant praise does the same writer bestow on the "Gentleman at his Desk." The etching represents a man seated at his desk, rummaging distraught for a lost paper. His wife is standing by his side. In the background a man waits. A dog and other accessories complete the piece. The masterly power with which character is expressed in the face and attitudes is the most striking quality of the etching. Mr. Hamerton emphasises its soundness of dry-point work. A third of Wilkie's etchings is "Boys and Dogs." The execution is very spirited and light. The extreme naturalness and ease of the attitudes are additional features of note.

Sir David Wilkie

The main characteristics of Wilkie's work as an etcher may be summarised as good composition and happy selection of line. Here, moreover, as in his larger works, his perception of character was of rare excellence; and this insight is adequately sustained by his gift of technique.

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Index.

- "ABBOTSFORD Family, The," 77, 79
 Adelaide, Queen, portrait of, 148
 Aikman, William, 11, 12
 Alexandria, Wilkie at, 178-180
 "Alfred in the Neatherd's Cottage," 46
 Allan, David, Burns's appreciation of, 9
 — relation to Dutch *genre*, 10
 — satirical sketches by, 4
 — studies of Scottish life and character, 6-8, 79
 Allan, Sir William, 26, 99, 147
 Altrive, scene at, 76-77
 Angerstein, John J., 62
 "Annals," 140-141
 Arbuthnot, Lord, portrait of, 167
 Armstrong, Sir Walter, 10, 207
 "BAGPIPER, The," 66
 Baillie, Dr., 56, 62, 67
 — Joanna, 56, 161, 210
 "Baird, Sir David, discovering the dead body of Tippoo Sahib," 151, 159-162
 "Bathsheba, Study of," 75
 Bavaria, King of, 83
 Beaumont, Sir George, accomplishments of, 45
 — death of, 119
 — friendship with Wilkie, 43, 57, 62, 75, 112
 Beaumont, Sir George, Wordsworth and, 44
 "Benvenuto Cellini and the Pope," 167
 Bethlehem, Wilkie at, 176
 Bird, Edward, 61
 "Blind Fiddler, The," 48-50, 56
 "Blind Man's Buff," 63, 65, 209
 Bologna, Wilkie at, 109
 "Bounty Money, The, or The Village Recruit," 34
 "Breakfast, The," 74
 "Bride's Toilet, The," 165, 170
 "Broken China Jar, The," 75
 Brydall, Robert, *Art in Scotland*, 189
 Burnet, John, 3, 26, 56, 57, 195
 Burns, Robert, 8, 9
 CALAIS, Wilkie's arrest at, 74
 "Camels, Study of," 188
 "Cardinals, Priests, and Roman Citizens washing the Pilgrims' Feet," 122
 "Card Players, The," 50, 51, 53
 Carse, Alexander, 3, 4
 Chantrey, Sir Francis, 3, 193
 "Chelsea Pensioners, The," 3, 72, 81, 82, 86-93, 189
 "China Menders, The," 82
 "Circassian Lady, A," 186
 "Clubbists, The," 53

Sir David Wilkie

- Coleorton, Memorials of*, by Professor Knight, 45
Coleridge, S. T., 45, 46, 210
Collection, Select, of Original Scottish Airs, 8, 9
 Collins, Francis, 197
 — William, 37, 39, 162, 177, 197
 — W. Wilkie, 197
 "Columbus, Christopher, in the Convent at La Rabida," 151-153
 "Confessional, The," 122
 Constantinople, Wilkie's impressions of, 171-172
 Correggio, 31, 110, 115, 121, 126
 "Cottage Toilet, The," 163
 "Cotter's Saturday Night, The," 163
 "Country Fair, The"—see "Pitlessie Fair"
 Cults Parish, 18, 19, 31
 Cunningham, Allan, 9, 13, 23, 65, 76, 91
 Cupar, Wilkie entertained by Town Council of, 100
 — Wilkie made a burghess of, 78
 "Cut Finger, The," 55
- DA VINCI, Leonardo, 105
 Davison, Alexander, 46
 Dead Sea, Wilkie's survey of the, 176
 "Death of Sir Philip Sidney, The," 79
 Del Sarto, Andrea, 106
 Devotion to art, Wilkie's, 199
 "Diana and Calisto," 27
 "Distraining for Rent," 70-72
 Dobree, Samuel, 67, 71, 78, 79
Douglas, Home's, 29, 30
 Dresden, Wilkie at, 114-116
 "Duncan Gray," 66
- Dutch genre, David Allan and, 10
 — Wilkie and, 10, 51, 103, 169, 206
- ELGIN Marbles, Wilkie and Haydon study the, 53
 "Empress Josephine, The, and the Sorceress of San Domingo," 163
 Engravings of Wilkie's pictures, 218-222
 "Errand Boy, The," 79
 Escorial, The, 125, 126
 Esdaile, William, portrait of, 156
- FERGUSON, Sir Adam, 95
 Ferguson, Mrs., of Raith, portrait of, 167
 "First Ear-ring, The," 152, 153
 Fitzgerald, Lady Mary, portrait of, 53
 Florence, Wilkie at, 106, 118
 Foulises, The, of Glasgow, 7
 Freeling, Sir Francis, 66
 Frith, W. P., R.A., anecdote regarding Wilkie by, 194
- "GAMEKEEPER, The," 62
 Geddes, Andrew, 95
 Geneva, Wilkie at, 123
Gentle Shepherd, The, 6, 7, 29, 30, 35, 99, 149, 167
 George IV., appreciation of Wilkie, 83, 120-121, 133
 — Wilkie's picture on the visit to Edinburgh of, 141-142
 — portrait of, 141
 — visit to Scotland of, 93-95
 "George IV., His Majesty, received by the people of Scotland," 141-142
 Gillespie, Professor, 21, 22, 99, 118

Index

- "Gipsy Mother, The," 57
 Goethe on Art, 104-105
 Goodall, Frederick, R.A., anecdote regarding Wilkie by, 194
 Gordon, Sir John Watson, 26
 Graham, John, 25, 27, 30
 Graham, Mrs., of Greigston, portrait of, 35
 Graves, Algernon, 190
 Gray, Thomas, 7
 "Group in a Café," 188
 "Guerilla's Departure, The," 128, 131
 "Guerilla's Return, The," 129, 132
 "Guess my Name," 88, 89

 HALLICOD Mirza, portrait of, 184
 Hamilton, Gavin, 6, 14
 Hardie, Miss, a cousin of Wilkie's, 35
 Haydon, B. R., anecdotes regarding Wilkie by, 54, 61, 69, 70, 85, 135, 136, 158-159
 — animadversions upon Wilkie, 195-196
 — artistic ambition of, 38
 — French tour with Wilkie, 69-70
 — introduces Wilkie to Leigh Hunt, 53
 — Keats's tributes to, 37
 — poems of Wordsworth and Mrs. Browning addressed to, 38
 — praise of Wilkie, 140, 181
 — taken by Wilkie to view the Elgin Marbles, 53
 Hazlitt, W., on Hogarth and Wilkie, 210
 "Hebrew Women reading the Scriptures," 186
 Henley, W. E., criticism of Wilkie by, 207

 "Highland Family, The," 100
 Historical paintings of Wilkie, 144-167, 203-206
 Hogarth, William, 4, 210
 Hogg, James, 76, 77
 Holland, Wilkie's holiday in, 72-74
 Holmberg, Professor, on "The Reading of a Will," 85
Hudibras, 10
 Humour, Wilkie's, 196
 Hunt, Leigh, 53

 "IRISH Whisky Still, The," 167
 Irving, Rev. Edward, portrait of, 152, 153
 — Pierre, 132
 — Washington, 132, 133, 152

 JACKSON, John, 39, 43, 90
 Jamesone, George, 11
 Jerusalem, Wilkie's sojourn at, 174-178
 "Jew's Harp, The," 33, 55
 Joseph, statue of Wilkie by, 183, 193
 "Josephine, Empress, and the Sorceress of San Domingo," 163

 KEATS, John, 37, 119
 Kellie, Lord, portrait of, 14, 99, 134
 Kinnear, Mr., of Kinloch, 34
 Kneller, Sir Godfrey, 12
 Knight, Professor, *Memorials of Coleorton* by, 45
 Knighton, Sir William, 120, 141, 162
 "Knox, John, dispensing the Sacrament at Calder House," 166

Sir David Wilkie

- "Knox, The Preaching of, before the Lords of the Congregation," 145-147
- "LADY of Pera, A," 185
- Laidlaw, William, anecdote of Wilkie and Hogg, 76
- "Landscape, A Woody," 75
- Landseer, Sir Edwin, 99, 182
- Lansdowne, Lady, portrait of, 53
- Lawrence, Sir Thomas, 83, 84, 90, 138
- Leslie, Sir John, portrait of, 150
- Leslie, C. R., 71, 139, 185
- "Letter of Introduction, The," 66-67
- Leven, Earl of, 26, 76
- Liston, Sir Robert, 99, 119, 120, 121
- Lockhart, J. G., 28, 46, 47, 120, 156, 198
- Louvre, Wilkie's studies in the, 68, 69
- Lyndhurst, Lady, portrait of, 142
- MACDONALD, Thomas, 64, 194
- Macneill, Hector, 29
- MacGrigor, Sir James, portrait of, 152
- Madrid, Wilkie at, 125
- "Maid of Saragossa, The," 128, 130-134
- Mansfield, Earl of, 41
- Manson, J. A., 93
- Martin, David, 13, 24
- Medinas, The, 11, 12
- Mehemet Ali, portrait of, 179
- Melville, Lord, portrait of, 142, 143
- Metternich, Prince, 117
- Michael Angelo, 106, 107, 108
- Molenaer, Jan, 10
- "Monks, Two Spanish, in the Capuchin Convent at Toledo," 148-149
- Montagu, Lord, portrait of, 156
- More, Jacob, 16
- Morland, George, 40
- Mulgrave, Lord, 43, 45
- Mulready, William, 37, 39, 67
- Munich, Wilkie at, 113
- Murillo, 122, 126, 127, 129
- "NAPOLEON and the Pope in Conference at Fontainebleau," 156-157
- Nash, Joseph, 183
- Nasmyth, Alexander, 16, 99
- "Nativity, Sketch for the," 188
- Neave Family, portrait group of the, 58
- "New Coat, The," 53
- "News mongers, The," 88
- "Not at Home," 149
- "Nymphs gathering Grapes," 82
- O'CONNELL, Daniel, portrait of, 165
- Ostade, Adriaen van, 3, 68, 73, 104, 216
- Ostade, Isaac van, 16
- "PARISH Beadle, The," 98
- "Pedlar, The," 67
- Peel, Sir Robert, 96, 97, 145, 182
- "Peep o' Day Boy, The," 155, 156
- "Penny Wedding, The," 8, 79-80, 209
- "Pera, A Lady of," 185
- "Persian Prince, A," 184
- Phipps, Hon. Miss H., portrait of, 72
- "Pifferari playing Hymns to the Madonna, The," 122, 133

Index

- "Pitlessie Fair," 10, 31-34, 63, 209
 Portrait-painting, Scots, 11-14
 "Preaching of Knox before the Lords of the Congregation, The," 145-147
 "Posada, The Spanish," 128
 Prices of Wilkie's pictures, 189-190

 "RABBIT on the Wall, The," 72
 Raeburn, Sir Henry, 11, 13-14, 97, 127, 136
 Raimbach, Abraham, 65, 72, 93, 112
 Ramsay, Allan, 6
 Ramsay, Allan, the younger, 11-12
 "Rat Hunters, The," 63
 "Recruit, The Village," 34
 "Refusal, The," 67
 Rembrandt, 3, 98, 141, 169
 "Rent Day, The," 51-53
 Reynolds, Sir Joshua, 13, 127
 "Roman Princess washing the Pilgrims' Feet, A," 123
 Rome, Wilkie at, 106, 118, 119
 Rubens, 12, 68, 73, 169, 170
 Runciman, Alexander, 15
 — John, 15
 Ruskin, John, 2, 153
 Russell, Lord John, 158

 "SANCHO Panza in the Days of his Youth," 152
 "Saviour, The, at Emmaus," 188
 "School, The," 89
 Scott, Sir Walter, correspondence with Wilkie regarding illustration of the "Waverley Novels," 136-138
 — death of, 147
 — financial troubles of, 109
 — on George IV.'s humour, 56
 Scott, Sir Walter, welcomes George IV. to Edinburgh, 94
 — with Wilkie in Edinburgh, 95
 Severn, Edward, 119
 Shee, Sir Martin, 139-140
 "Sheepwashing," 75
 "Sick Lady, The," 53
 Silvestre, T., 66
 "Sketch for the Nativity," 188
 Smith, Edward, 111
 Smith, Sydney, 201
 "Smugglers, The," 99
 Smyrna, Wilkie at, 173
 Spain, Wilkie in, 124-133
 "Spanish Mother, The," 149, 150
 St. Andrews, 35, 143, 146
 Stafford, Marquis of, 74, 83
 Steen, Jan, 3, 10, 208
 Sultan, the, portrait of, 172
 "Sunday Morning," 46
 Sussex, Duke of, portrait of, 149

 TALMA, 69, 101, 118
 Tankerville, Earl of, portrait of, 163
 Teniers, David, 3, 56, 116, 208
 Thomson, George, 8, 25
 — Rev. John, of Duddingston, 17, 75
 — Mrs., *Recollections* of, 87, 88
 Tintoretto, 110, 111
 Titian, 110, 111, 126
 Töplitz, Wilkie takes the baths at, 116
 Townshend, Lord Charles, 67, 172
 Trustees' Academy, Edinburgh, 6, 10, 24
 "Turkish Courier relating the News of the Capture of Acre, The," 187

